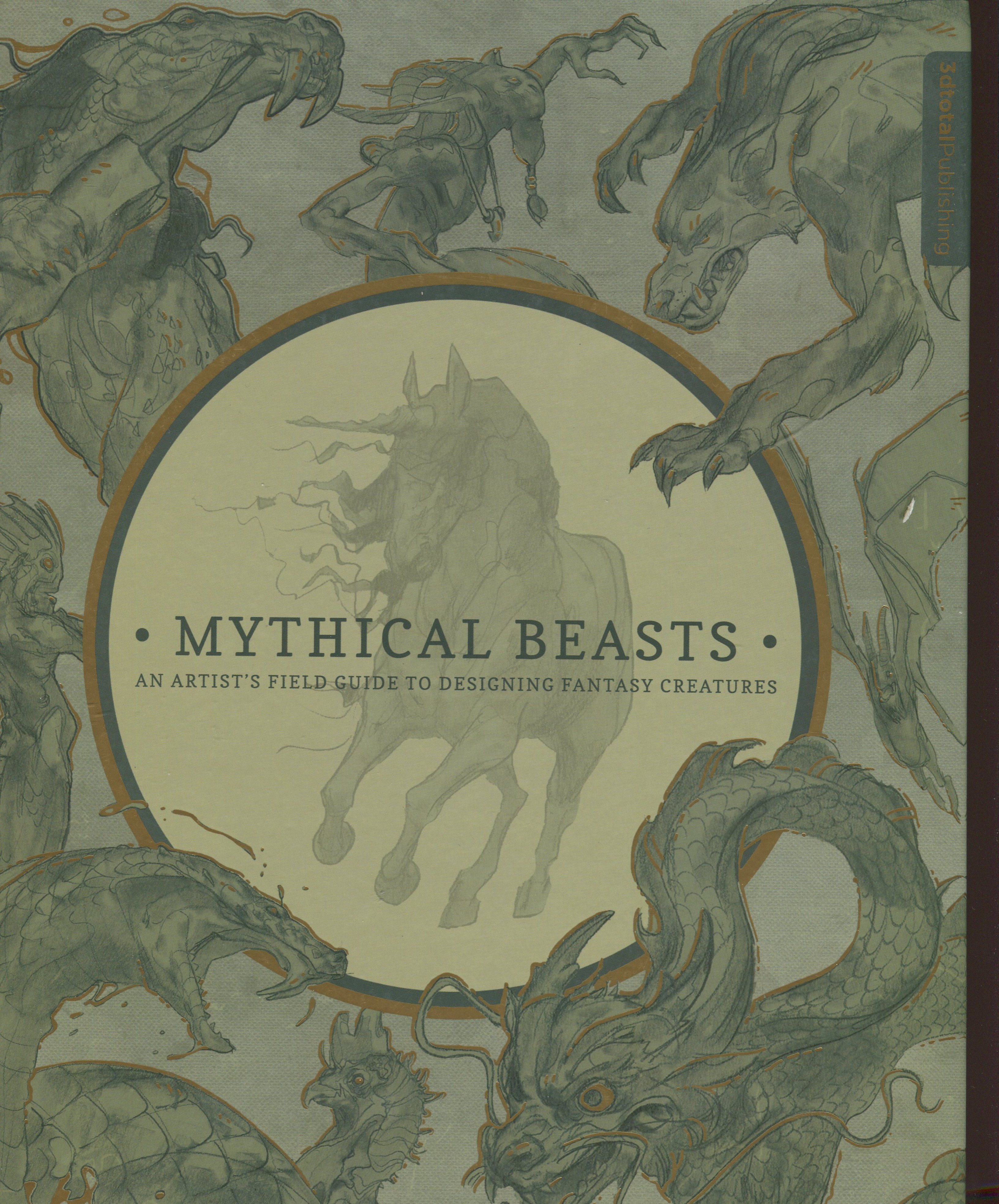

• MYTHICAL BEASTS •

AN ARTIST'S FIELD GUIDE TO DESIGNING FANTASY CREATURES

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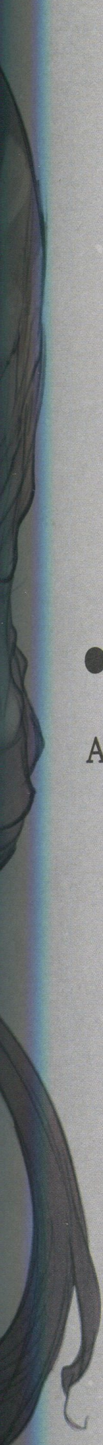

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First published in the United Kingdom, 2017,
by 3dtotal Publishing.
3dtotal.com Ltd, 29 Foregate Street,
Worcester, WR1 1DS, United Kingdom.

Soft cover ISBN: 978-1-909414-48-8
Printing and binding: Everbest Printing (China)
www.everbest.com

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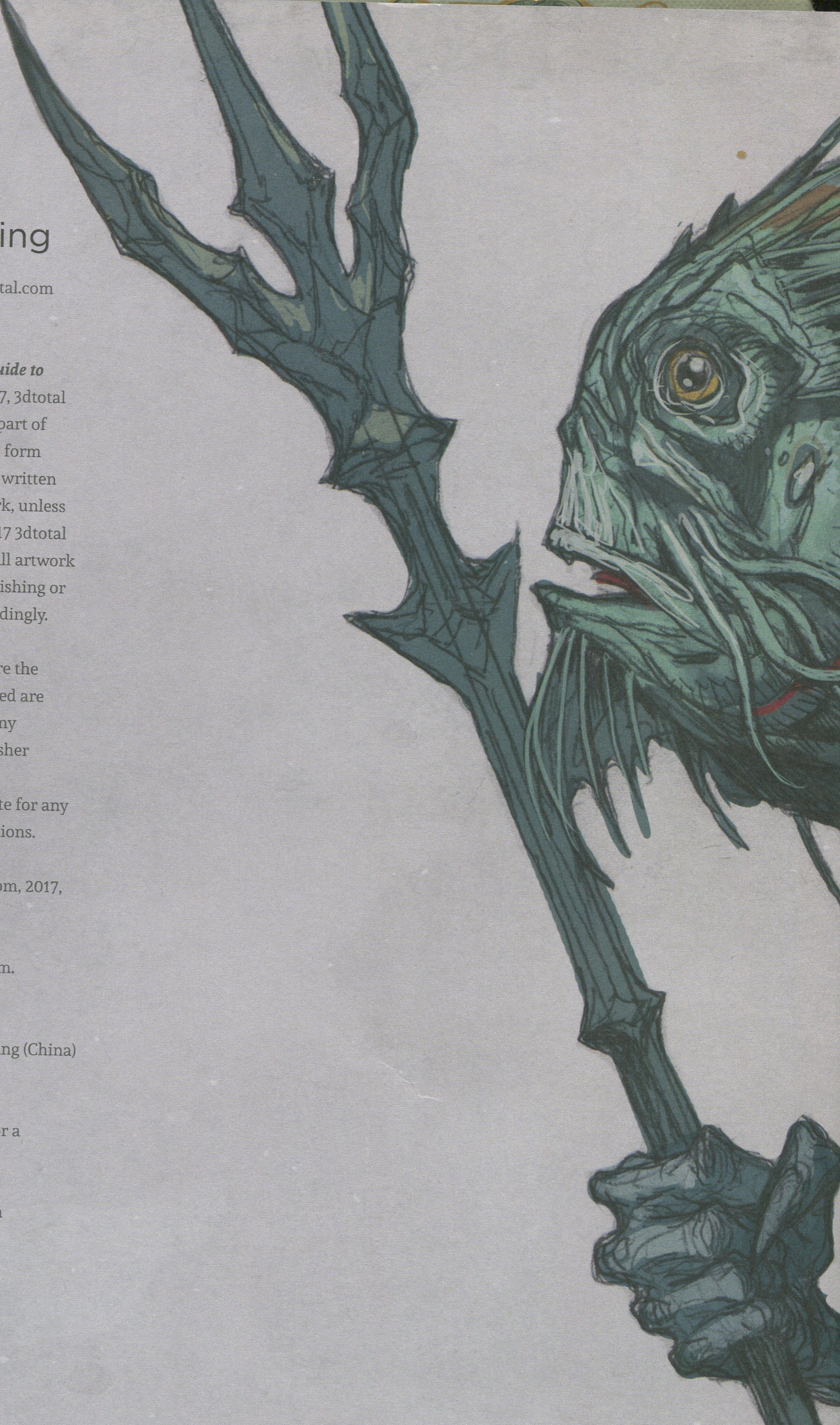

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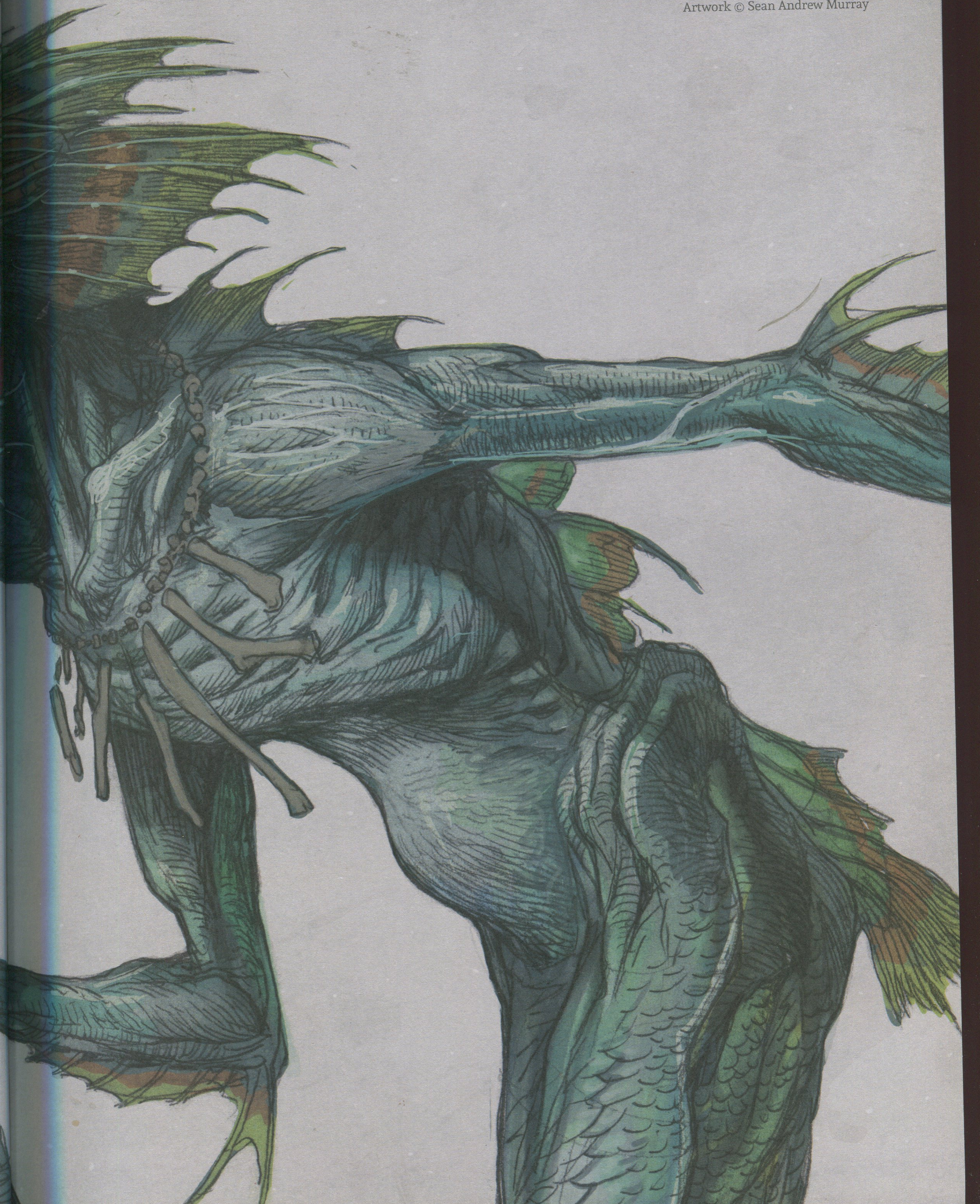

• FOREWORD •

Creature art and fantasy art draw their strength and allure from playfully straddling the line between what is known and what is invented. The "known" grounds our understanding of the creatures in our own real-world experience and acts as a point of reference, a structure which supports the whimsical, supernatural, or fantastical "invented" aspects of the design. Animals have always had a hold over the human imagination, particularly through folklore and mythology, and have long been used as allegories of the human condition, unexplainable events, unseen horrors, coveted virtues, and supernatural power.

In this book an incredible team of artists take you on a journey through the world of imagined creatures – some beasts that you know well, others that you may discover for the first time. Bringing each monster to life through the lens of their unique artistic vision, these creatives give you an intriguing tour of their process from research to rough sketches to the execution of their final illustration. Using an analysis of the original descriptions of each creature from mythology or folklore as a jumping-off point, each artist breaks down their conceptual

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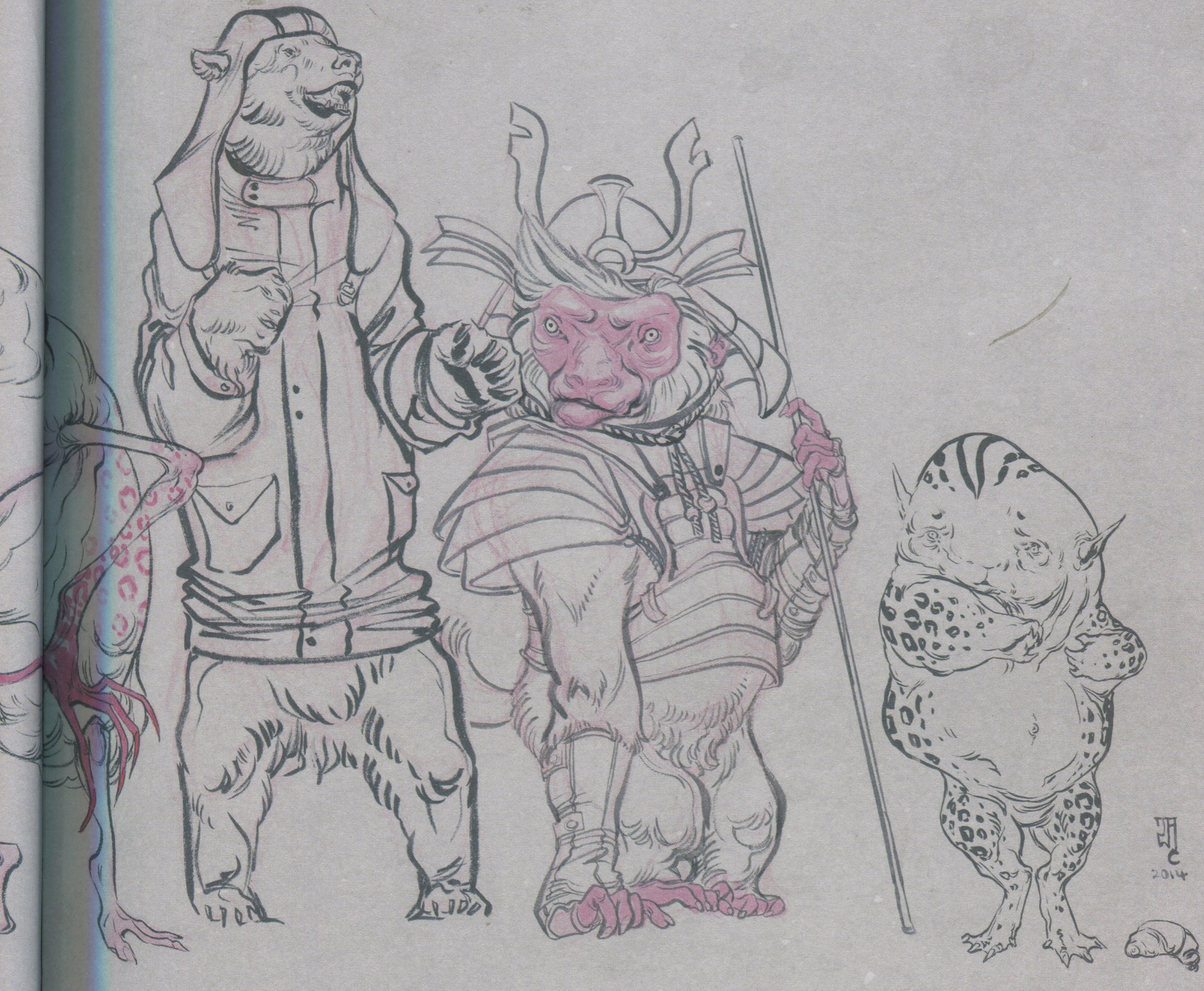

strategy from both a design and an artistic standpoint. Taking into consideration the environments, behaviors, and practical needs that would shape each mythical beast, various designs are explored and discussed until a victor emerges. Once thoughtfully designed, the artists then take you through their process of finding an optimal pose, composition, and execution to show off the creature and to enhance the emotional and narrative depth of the final image. Sprinkled along the way are a treasure trove of technical tips for rendering a variety of textures, capturing a sense of weight and movement, and boosting the dynamic quality of your work.

I hope that you thoroughly enjoy the expedition through the world of mythical creatures, as well the intimate look into the methods, processes, and conceptual strategies of these illustrious artists!

J.A.W. Cooper
Illustrator
instagram.com/jawcooper | jawcooper.com

• HOW TO USE THIS BOOK •

Whether you are looking for inspiration, want to learn more about the creature design process, or are just a fan of fantastical beasts, this book has something for you.

The thirty courageous pioneers involved in the *Mythical Beasts* expedition were each given a different cryptid to investigate, dissect, and design. The purpose of the trek is to demonstrate how artists use their innovation and research to develop a unique creature design that inspires imaginations and evokes a reaction from the viewer – as is the case in this compendium, often one of sheer dread! With this in mind, each chapter is split up into investigative and exploratory phases as detailed below.

Field notes

Most creature designers will tell you that studying real-world animals is fundamental to producing a believable concept, and the field notes section is where each artist does just that. Here you will see how elements such as patterns, textures, and anatomy can be extrapolated from something as seemingly mundane as a burdock plant to contribute to an original and terrifying design for a chupacabra.

Design process

The design process section covers the evolution of the creature concept, from thumbnails to working on different poses. Being able to see the visual progression of an artist's thoughts is invaluable, and here you will be able to observe how professionals take key elements from research and transform them into something extraordinary and magical. Examining a concept from different perspectives and in different poses allows you to appreciate the key components of a design and tackle problem areas not previously considered.

Subspecies

Versatility and imagination are fundamental in creature design, and in the subspecies section the pioneer travels further afield to discover other types of the beast under scrutiny. Not only is this just good fun, it enables you to see how one basic design can be adjusted and expanded upon to develop something related but new.

Final design

Here the artist summarizes their design choices and allows you to see the finished concept in glorious color and detail. In addition to a final illustration of the creature, each artist has offered up a black-and-white line drawing so you can see how the beast is constructed. You can also review the key facts of each cryptid, including the threat they pose to humans on a scale of one to five (just so you know what to keep an eye out for the next time you turn a corner!) – one being the least threatening and five being the "run away as fast as you can" level.

One final disclaimer: while the description of each creature is largely based on research, the nature of folklore and myth is that reports vary, imagination has a strong influence, and tales evolve. It is important to note therefore that the animals investigated here are the artists' interpretation of the evidence they found.

We hope you like what you find in this creative bestiary and wish you well on your travels!

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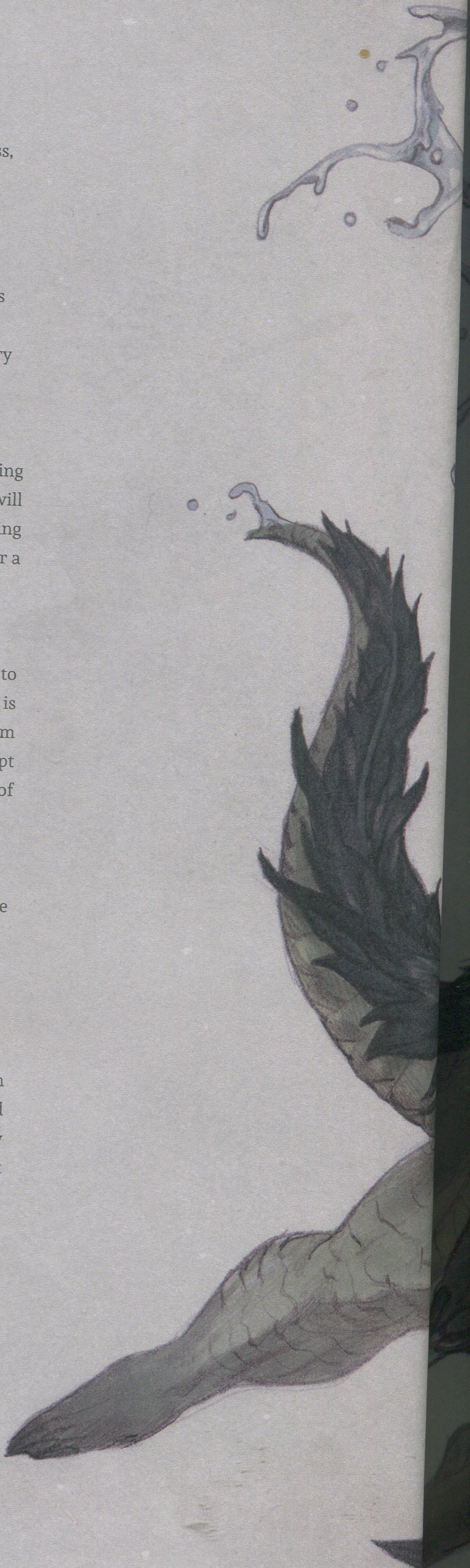

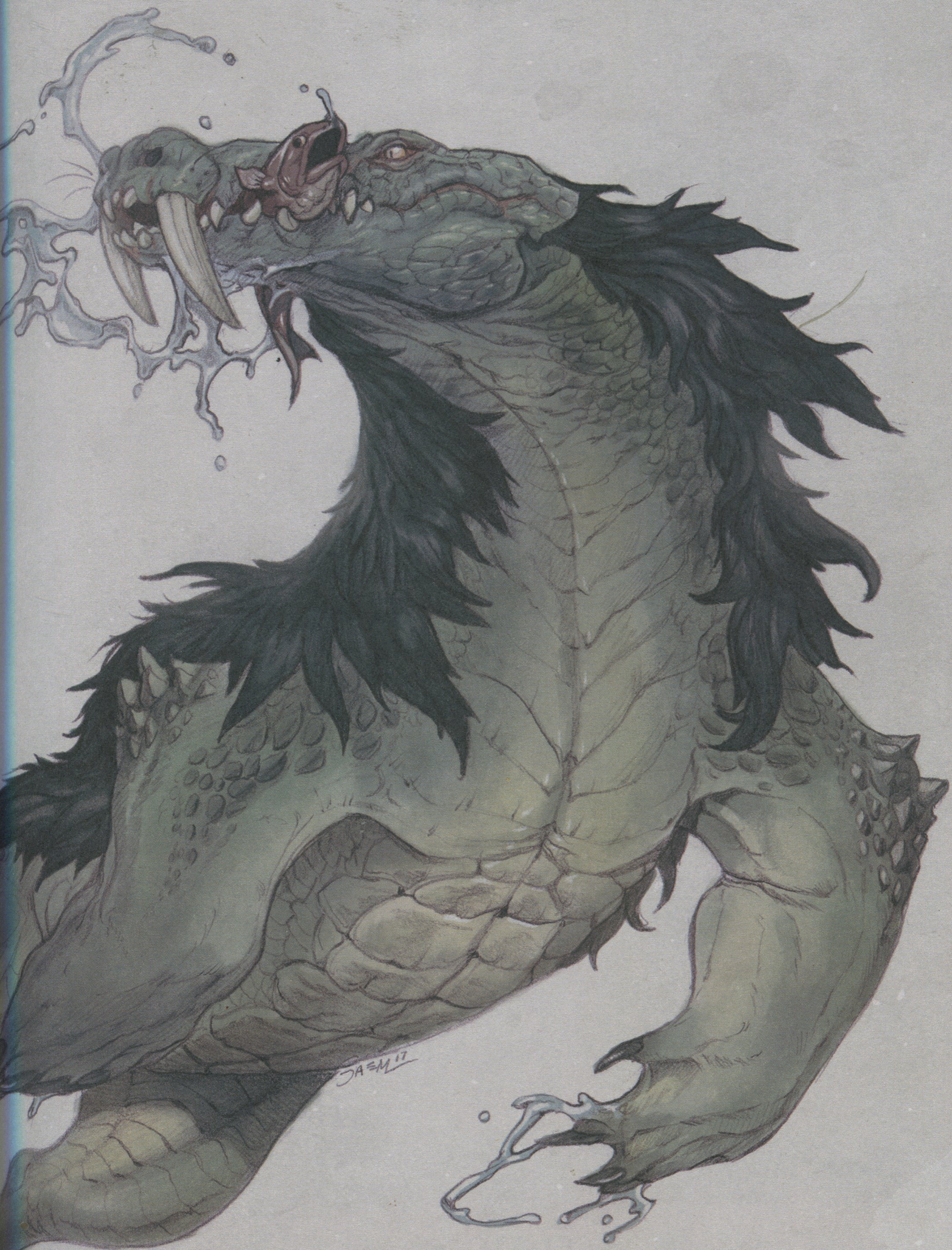

Artwork © Damien Mammoliti

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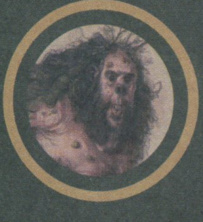

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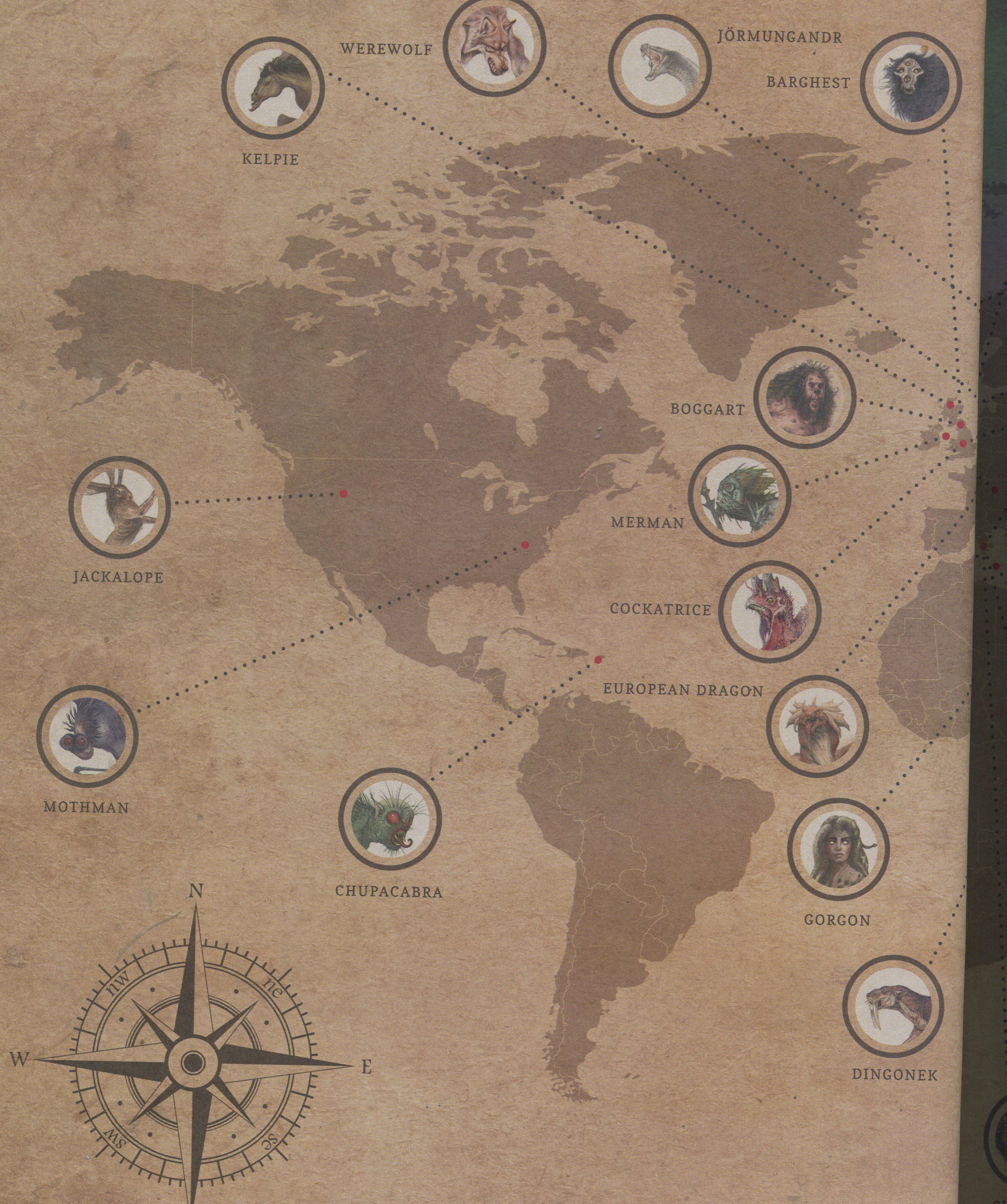
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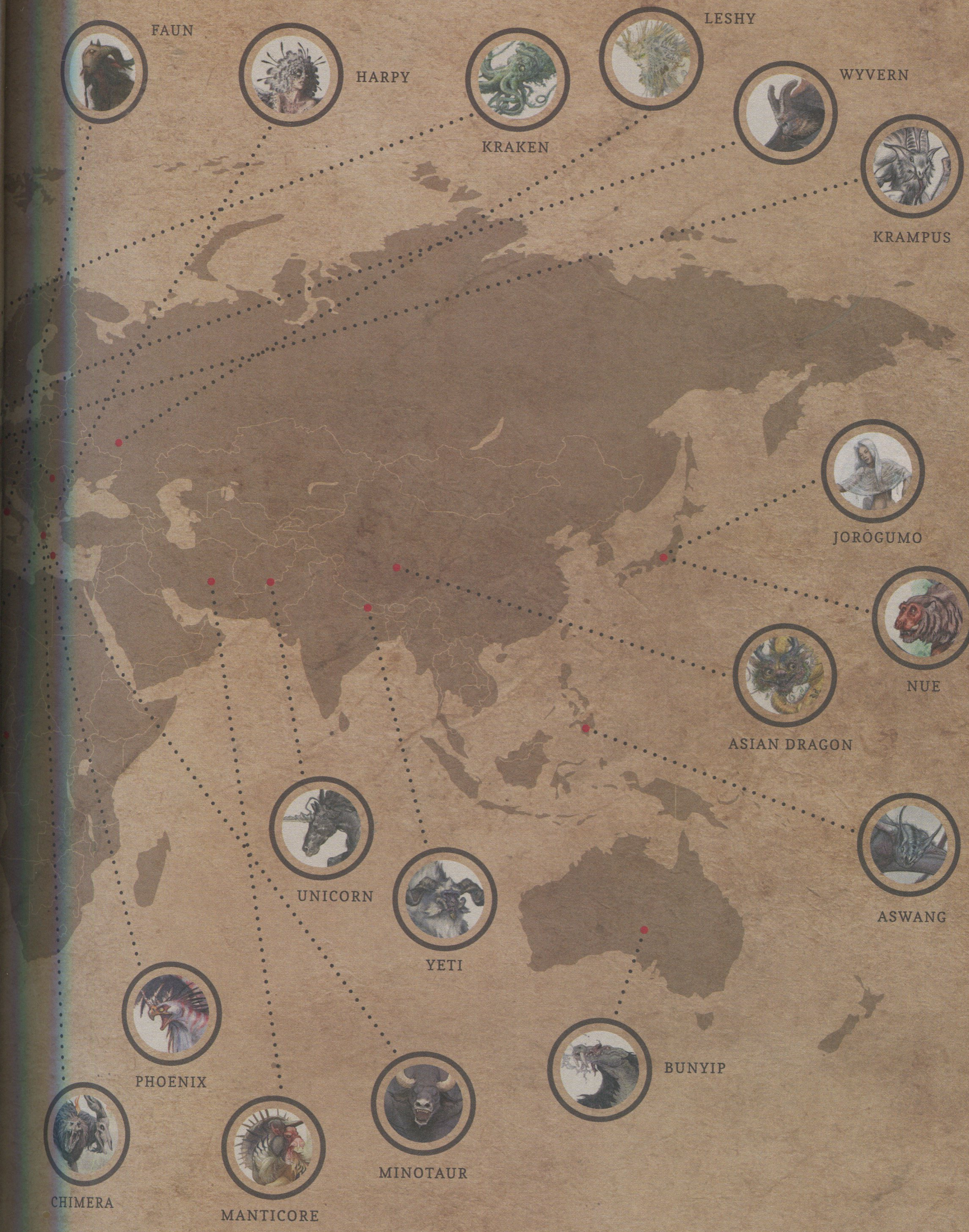
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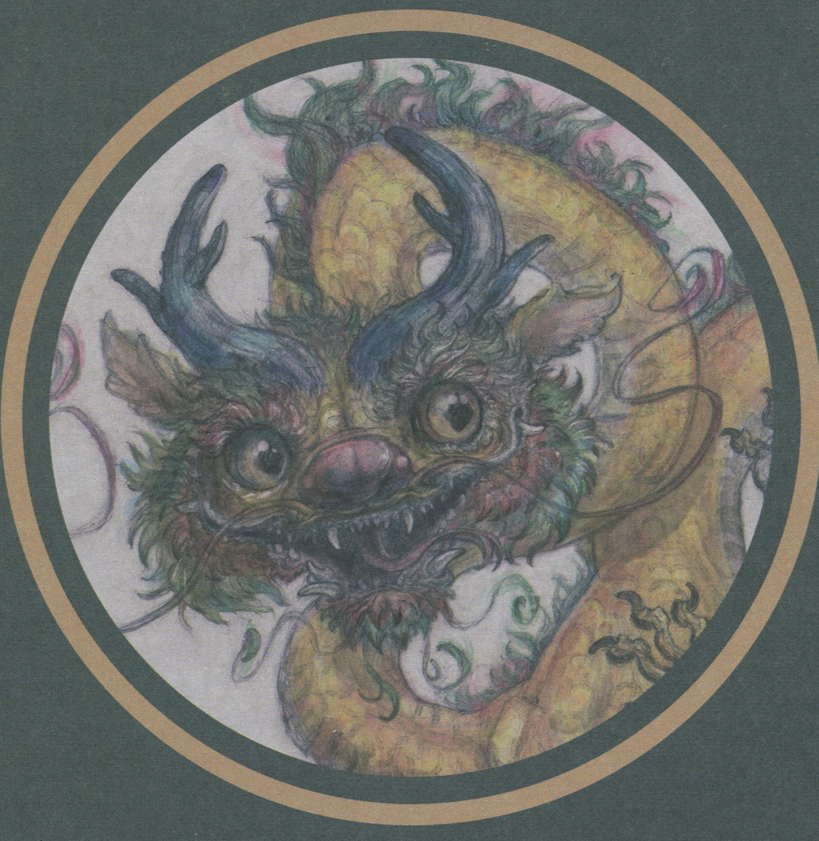


• ASIAN DRAGON •

The Asian dragon is an animal of a benevolent and intelligent nature. In many East Asian cultures it is said that the dragon brings rain to the harvests, dissipates storms when necessary, and brings happiness and prosperity to the home. It is also a very sensitive creature that can easily feel offense and anger, causing misfortune, which is why it is venerated and respected. Nobody wants to see a dragon angry! Depending on the place of origin, the dragon has different physical characteristics. In China, it is represented with a camel's or ox's snout, lobster eyes, carp scales, and five claws. In Japan, its face is like a crocodile's with a dog's nose and cat's eyes, and it has lizard scales and three fingers. In Korea, it is distinguished by its long beard and four claws. In spite of these differences, the majority of Asian dragons have a long body or snake's tail, a few deer antlers on their heads, a majestic lion's mane, and long mustaches like catfish. They also tend to have a buffalo's ears and usually do not have wings, even though they have the ability to fly. All these characteristics make the Asian dragon a very recognizable creature.

• ULKSY •

Illustrator & concept artist • ulksy.com

• FIELD NOTES •

Water dragon

The dragon's body is very long, like that of some lizards and snakes. I want the design to be elegant and graceful like a fawn, and at the same time agile like a cat, but without losing its reptilian appearance. I explore different types of reptiles, such as the water dragon, for the curvature and length of their bodies.

Scales

I study the scales of reptiles and fish, such as koi carp, to understand how they overlap and distribute across the body. I consider this element a very important aspect that will give the concept veracity and a touch of traditional Asian design.

Lion mane

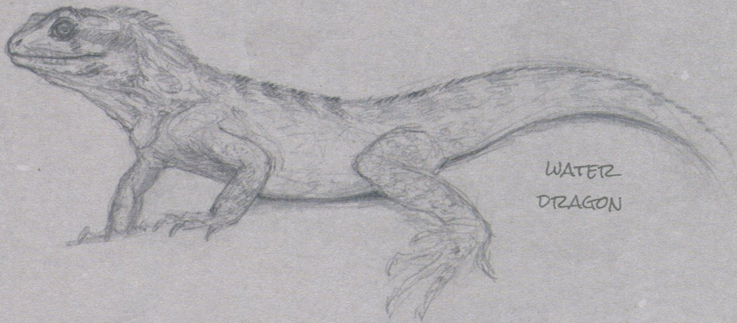
The lion's mane is a common feature of this species of dragon. I try to understand the structure and behavior of the tufts according to their direction. I also research other types of manes based on traditional statues that have curlier hair or more pointed tufts.

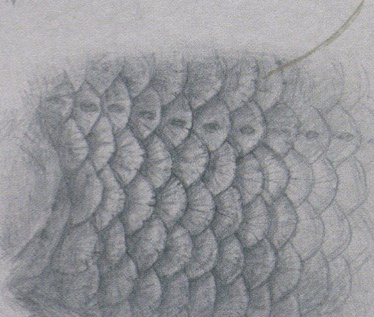
Antlers

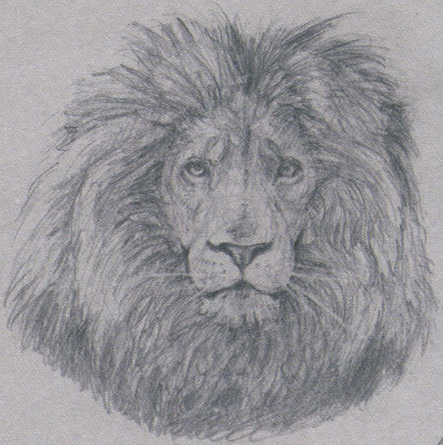
Deer antlers are another of the features that will bring majesty and elegance to the design. It is important that the antlers conform to the proportions of the dragon: for example, a smaller dragon will have shorter and broader ones than a larger and longer dragon, which may have much longer and thinner ones.

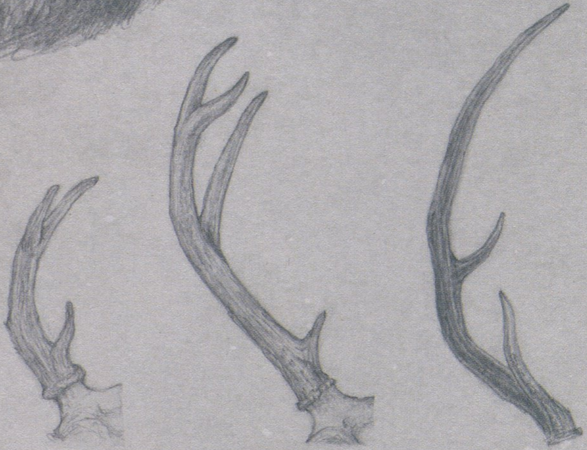
Eyes

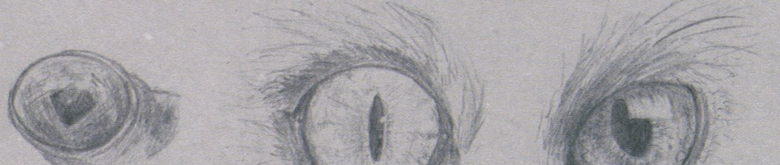
Large and lively eyes will express the intelligence and goodness of this creature, but also maintain their traditional form of a lobster or a cat. I research eyes intensely because they will be one of the main focuses of the design, bringing out much of the creature's personality.









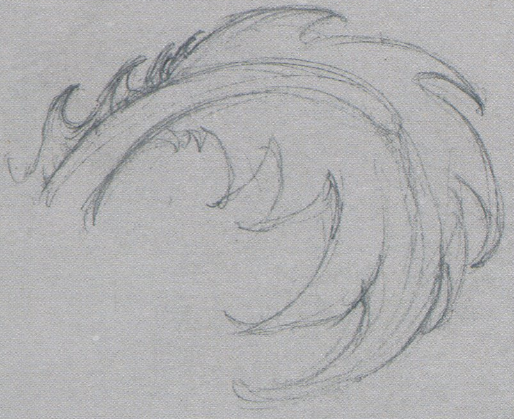


Hairy tail

Traditionally, the Asian dragon has a long tail ending in several strands of hair. To start, it is important to understand the direction in which the hair moves, and then make a quick sketch that determines the direction of the tufts as well as the proportion of the tail as a whole.

I start to define the tufts, keeping the proportion and directions that I sketched at the beginning. I look at where the tufts originate from, and am not afraid to make loose, fast, and uneven strokes, always following the marked direction. It is a good idea to observe traditional and historical artwork to get an idea of the proportions for this type of dragon.

To finish off the details, I keep in mind that the hair is perceived as a whole, or as sets of tufts, so I do not try to draw it hair by hair. I draw sets of tufts and add more lines in areas with a higher density of hair to create texture. Marking out those darker areas, or areas I want to highlight, will give more life to the drawing.



DETERMINING
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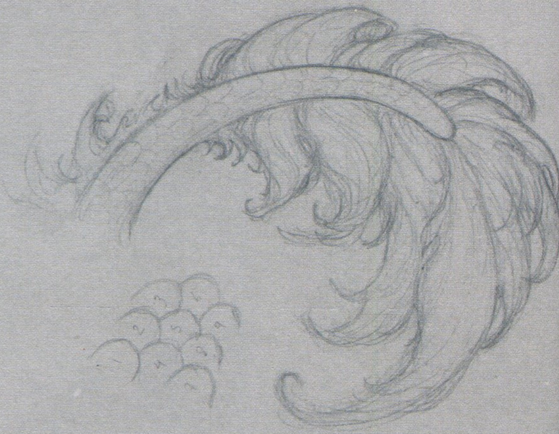
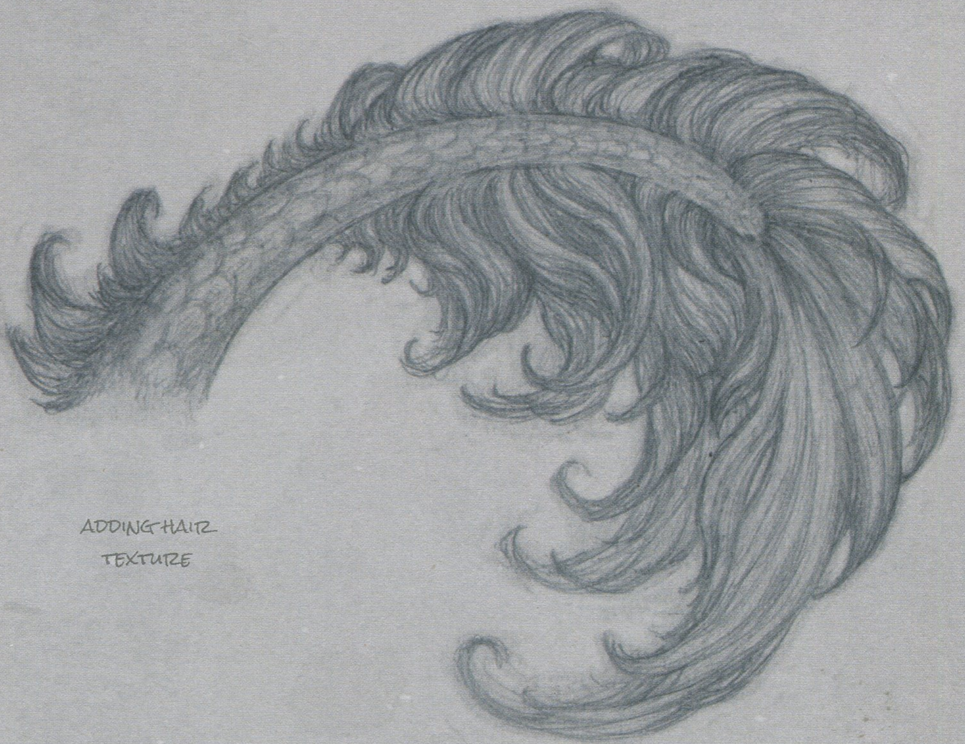


ADDING LOOSE
STROKES



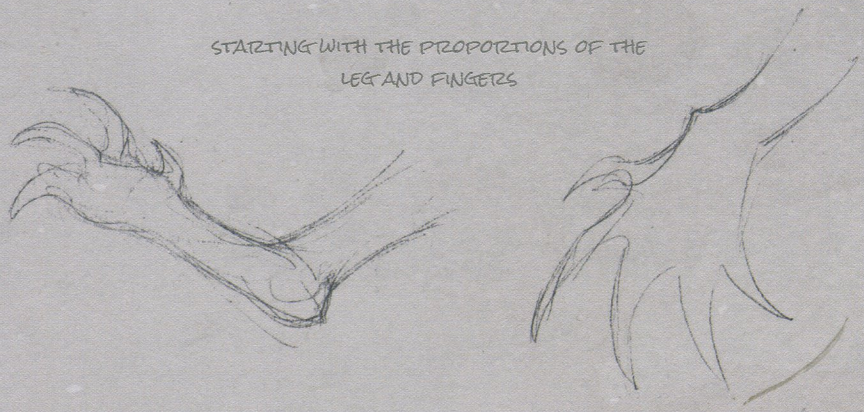
ADDING HAIR
TEXTURE

Dragon claws

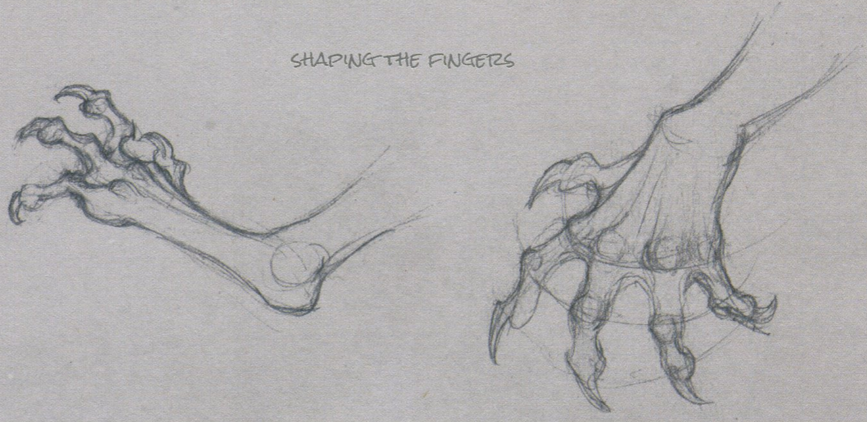
Many of the Asian dragon species have legs like reptiles, with long fingers and claws. I look for pictures of reptiles and observe the proportions of their legs and fingers, then start making a few quick lines to mark the direction and dimensions of the legs. I do not worry about the shape of the fingers at this point.

Once I have drawn the pose of the foot, I follow the direction and proportions that I have marked to shape the fingers. Tracing smooth lines that pass over the knuckles and joints of the phalanges help me to visualize the volumes of the foot and to draw the joints in the correct places. Marking these with small circles helps me to visualize them better.

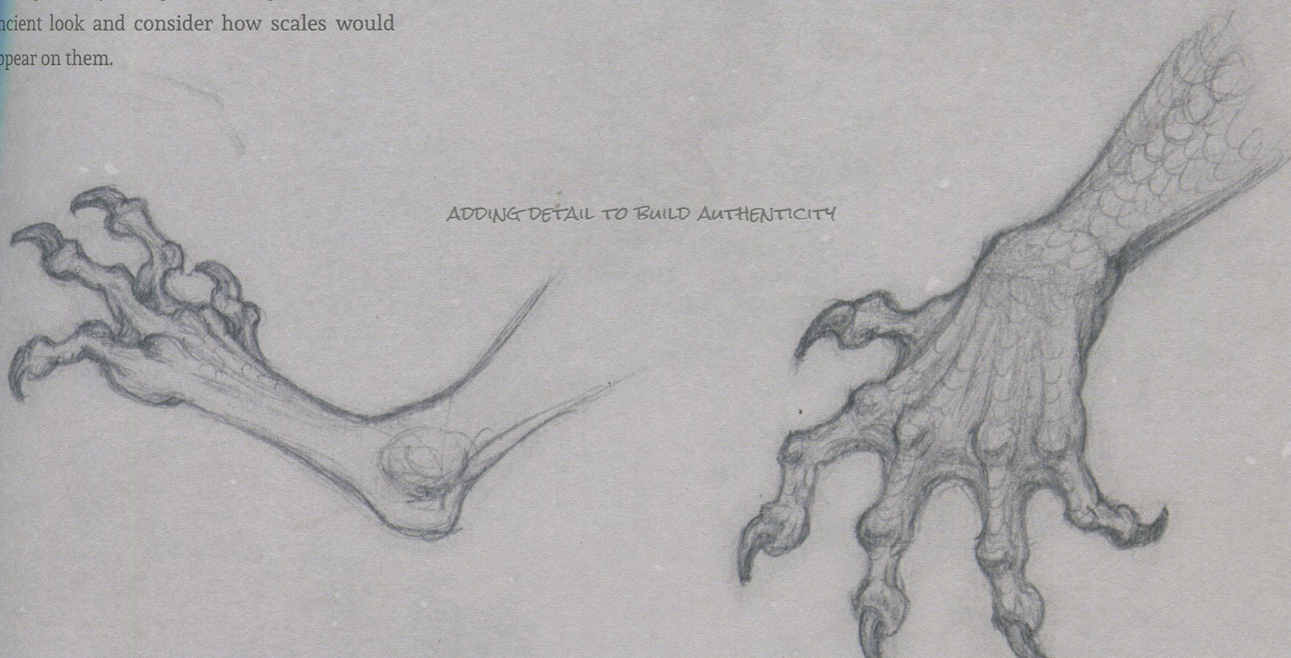
It is important to understand the anatomy of the legs to make them convincing. I look at real-world references to study the bones and understand how the fingers work. I carefully consider the origin and placement of the claws. The more you observe, practice, and understand what you are drawing, the more credibility the design will have. I make the digits bony and gnarled to give them an ancient look and consider how scales would appear on them.



STARTING WITH THE PROPORTIONS OF THE LEG AND FINGERS



SHAPING THE FINGERS



ADDING DETAIL TO BUILD AUTHENTICITY

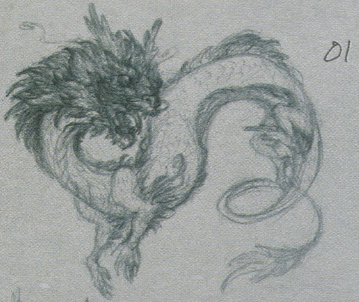
• DESIGN PROCESS •

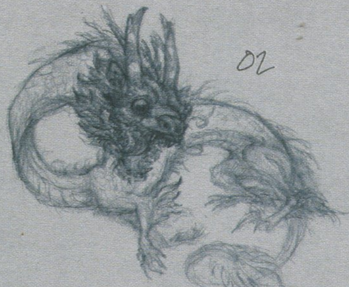
Thumbnails

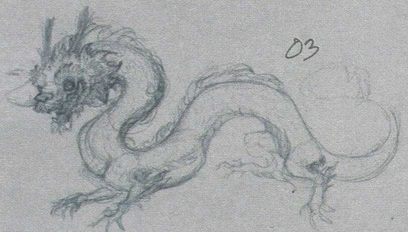
In the following thumbnails I studied different proportions and poses. I want the design to have an easily recognizable silhouette, so I tried to highlight the contortion of the body. Some of the thumbnails show the dragon on the ground while others show its swirling form flying through the air, almost as if it is swimming.

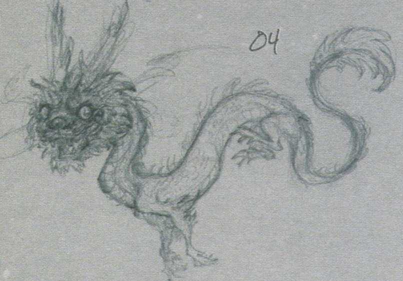
In the first two sketches I used similar poses with different proportions: the first with a longer and smaller head than the second, in which I looked for a more youthful and jovial appearance. In the final two thumbnails I explored the possibility of a much longer body; I did the opposite in thumbnails 05, 06, and 07, where I sketched much shorter bodies with more compact proportions. I prefer the proportions of thumbnail 09, which has intermediate proportions compared to those mentioned above, appearing more in tune with the traditional appearance of an Asian dragon that I seek.

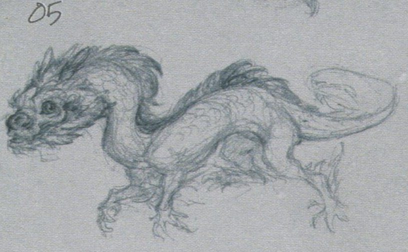
I studied the poses of cats, deer, and antelope in motion to try to capture these concepts. I also researched more historical East Asian art, such as statues and illustrations on parchment, which are very inspiring; I want the final design to reflect the essence and charm that those works present.

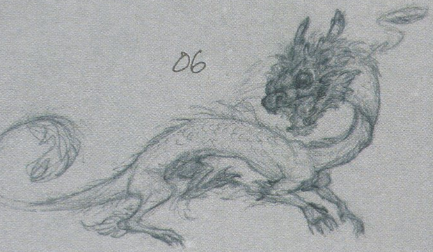


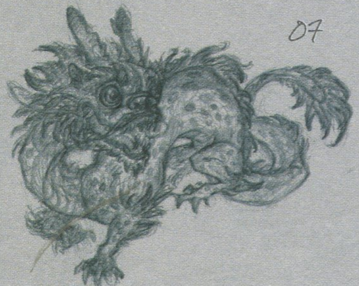


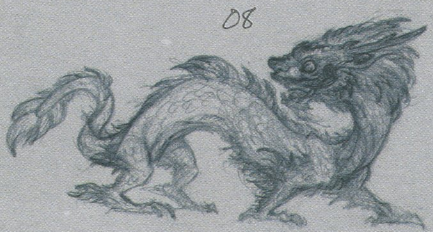


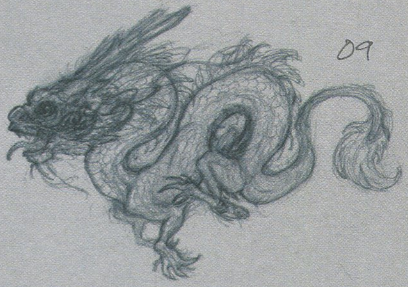


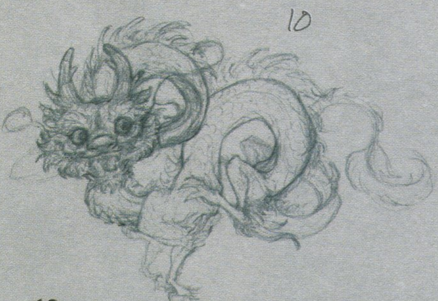


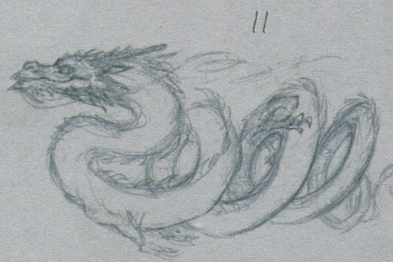


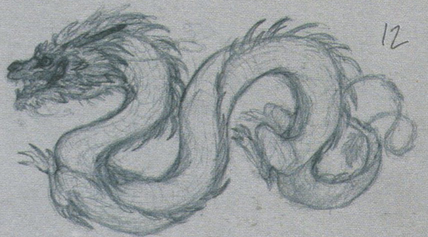










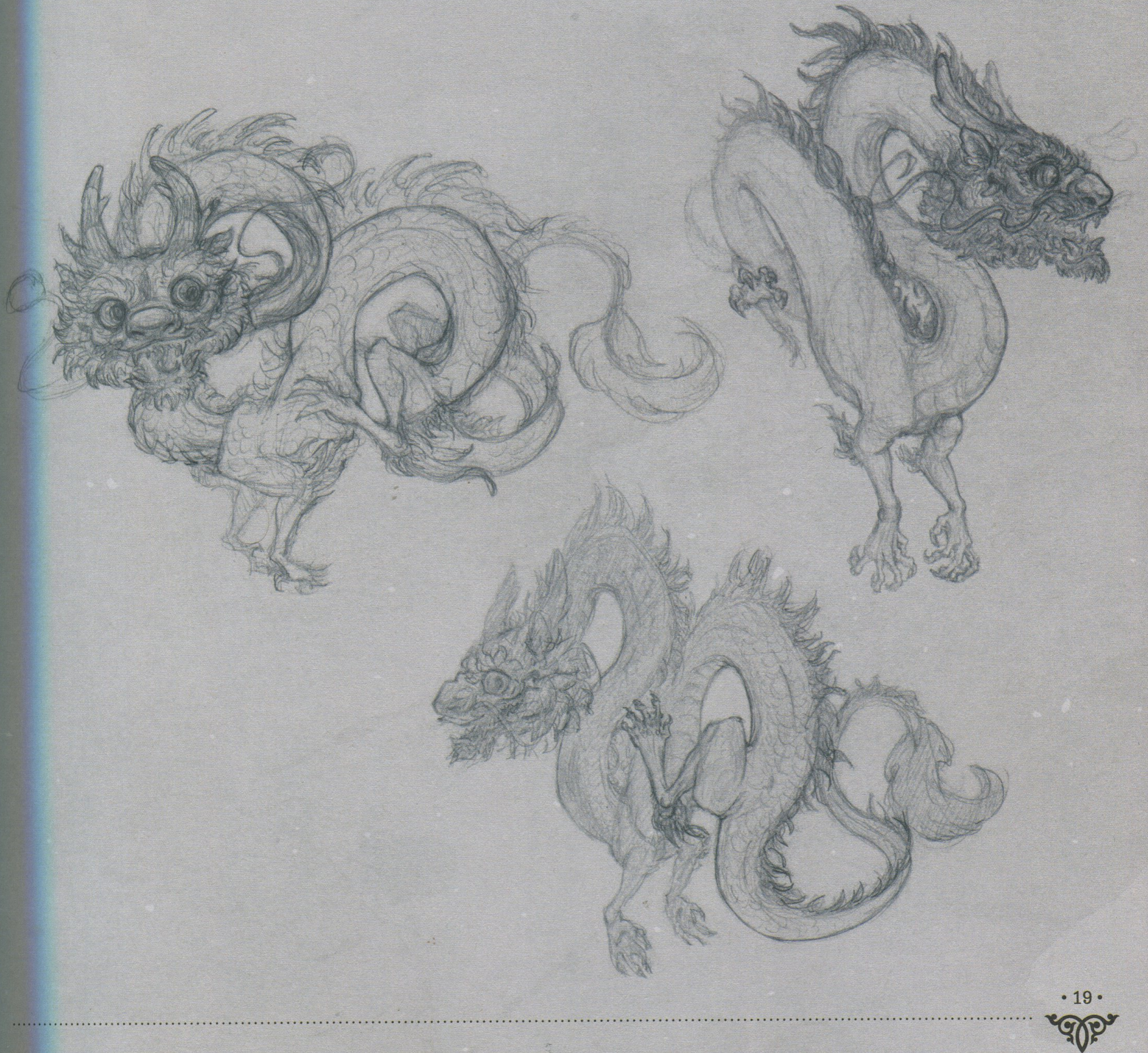


Further exploration

I created a similar sketch to thumbnail 10, this time with the head in a front view instead of in profile. From this angle, the facial expression gains a lot more strength and brings more personality to the creature. The body has an easily recognizable and dynamic silhouette, totally contracted with the pelvis and legs extended forward, making it appear prepared for a forward movement. The large eyes are highlighted here, and the open but non-threatening jaws give the dragon a more friendly appearance while still commanding respect. The flexibility of its body gives it an agile and graceful look.

From the side, you can see the elegance of the neck and the serpentine mustaches, and how the body is compacted into the form of an S-shape. The large, rounded nose and horns are not very long, but their shapes reinforce the curved forms of this species of dragon. The long tusks impose respect and remind us that the dragon can also become a fierce creature.

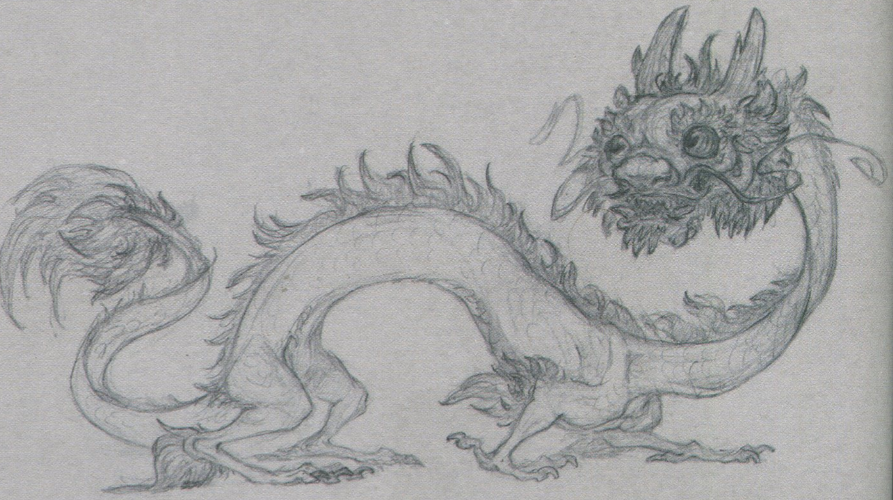
From a more three-quarter view of the rear of the beast, shown at the bottom of the page, you can better observe how the hip and hind legs move towards the head, and how the long tail sways elegantly towards an abundant tufted end that follows the dynamic direction of the body. It is important to understand the dragon's anatomy in detail at this point, such as how the pelvis is positioned forward and how the tail is born from its base. This will enable me to create credible poses that show off different parts of the design.

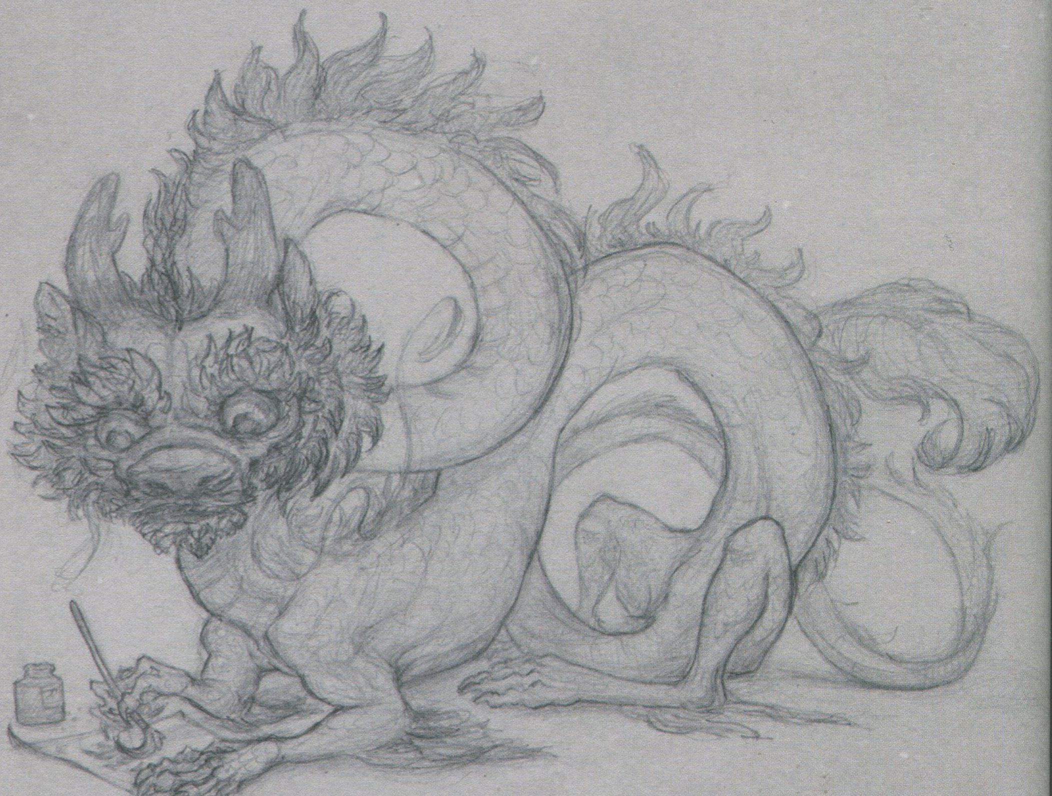


Poses

The first sketch shown here demonstrates a more static and traditional pose, with the dragon poised on its four legs instead of flying. The silhouette of this pose makes the design easily recognizable, and it is also a good pose through which to fully observe the anatomy of the dragon. Notice how the arched rump is always maintained, even when walking; in the case of longer-bodied dragons like this, it is easier to move around by crawling or even snaking along with their limbs held against their body.

The great intelligence of these dragons is well known. Many of them can speak and write in several languages (whenever they find a pencil or brush that is made to measure). In the pose below, you can see a dragon flaunting its calligraphy skills. Note how it sits on its hindquarters, maintaining the great curvature of its body and neck. Its front legs, in spite of being reptilian, are dexterous like ours – its long claws are the only things that make it difficult to hold a brush!

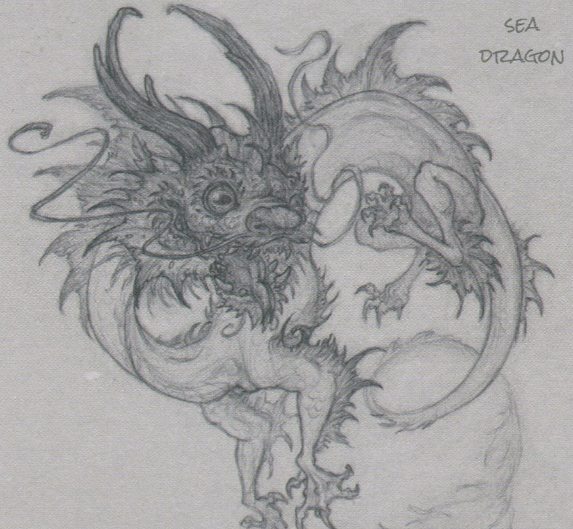




• SUBSPECIES •

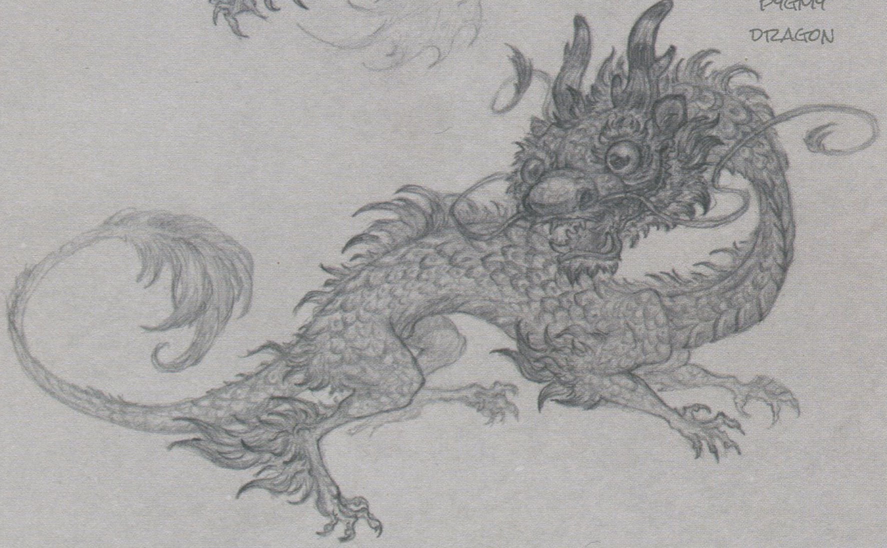
Sea dragon

This dragon lives in the ocean and is rarely seen out of the water. You can observe how its hair has disappeared, replaced by fins that provide stability and help with its swirling movements when swimming. The mane has been replaced by an imposing collar around the head, and the tail is membranous, which helps the dragon to propel itself and change direction underwater, just like its webbed feet. The scales of this dragon are very compact and fine, which reduces friction and allows it to swim at great speed, impelling its long body in a serpentine manner.



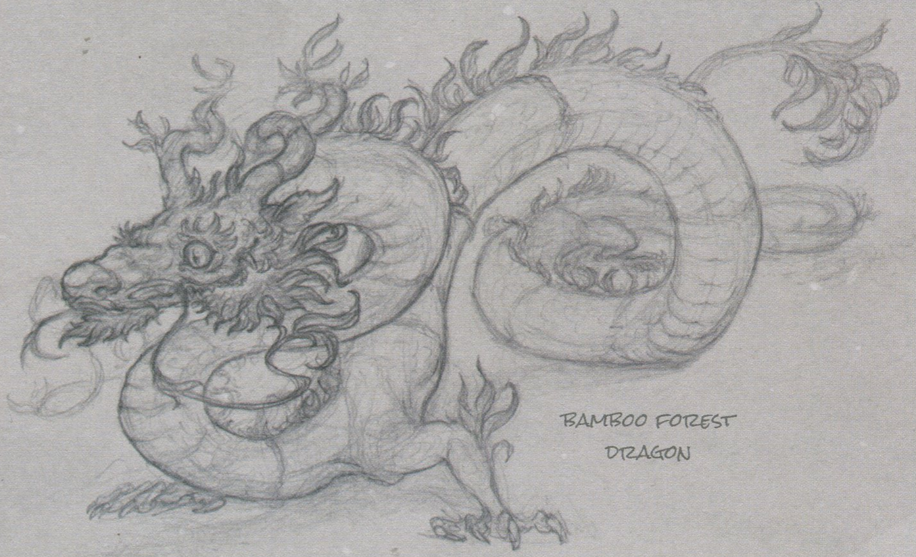
Pygmy dragon

Pygmy dragons have large, hard scales that enable them to retain heat for a long time after a good sunbathe. This means they can withstand the low temperatures that are common around the remote temples near the Himalayas where they reside. Their small size allows them to go unnoticed, sometimes sneaking into the kitchens of temples in search of snacks.



Bamboo forest dragon

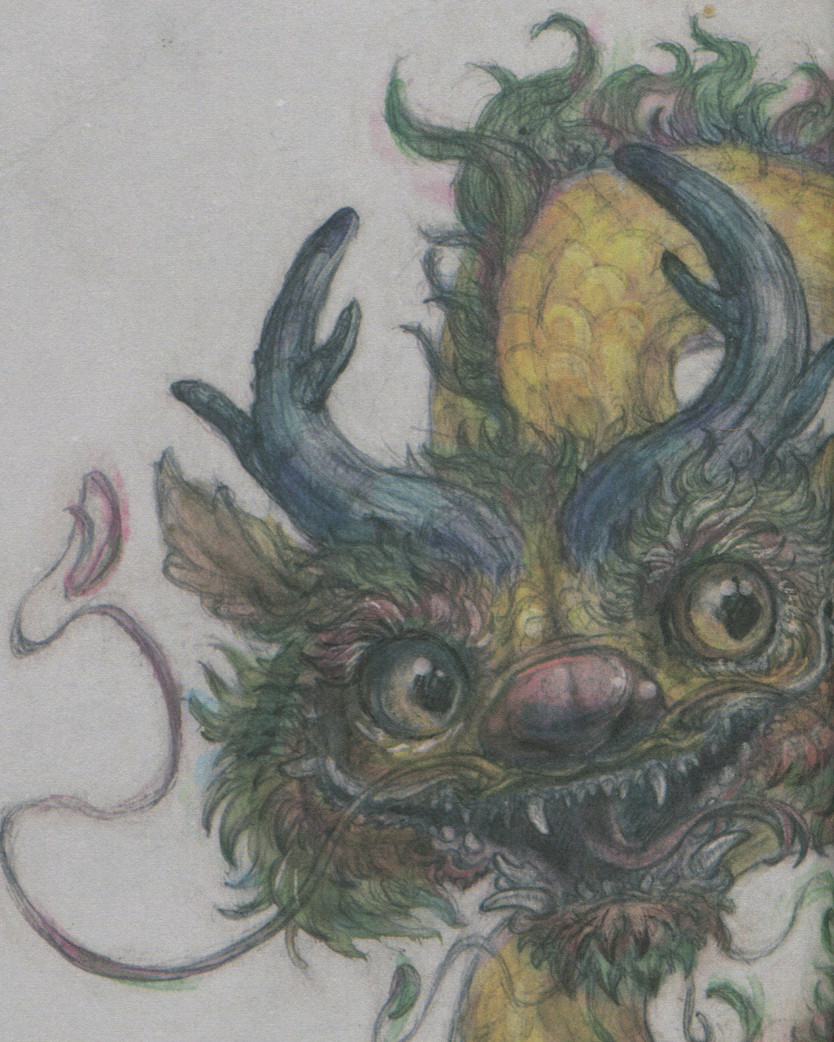
This subspecies has a much longer and slimmer body than some of its relatives, though it is not too large a dragon because it is adapted to live in bamboo forests, moving agilely between the stalks. It can camouflage itself perfectly against the colors and shapes of the bamboo by holding its arms and legs against its body. This allows it to meditate for hours without being disturbed. Its favorite snacks are dragonflies and grasshoppers.

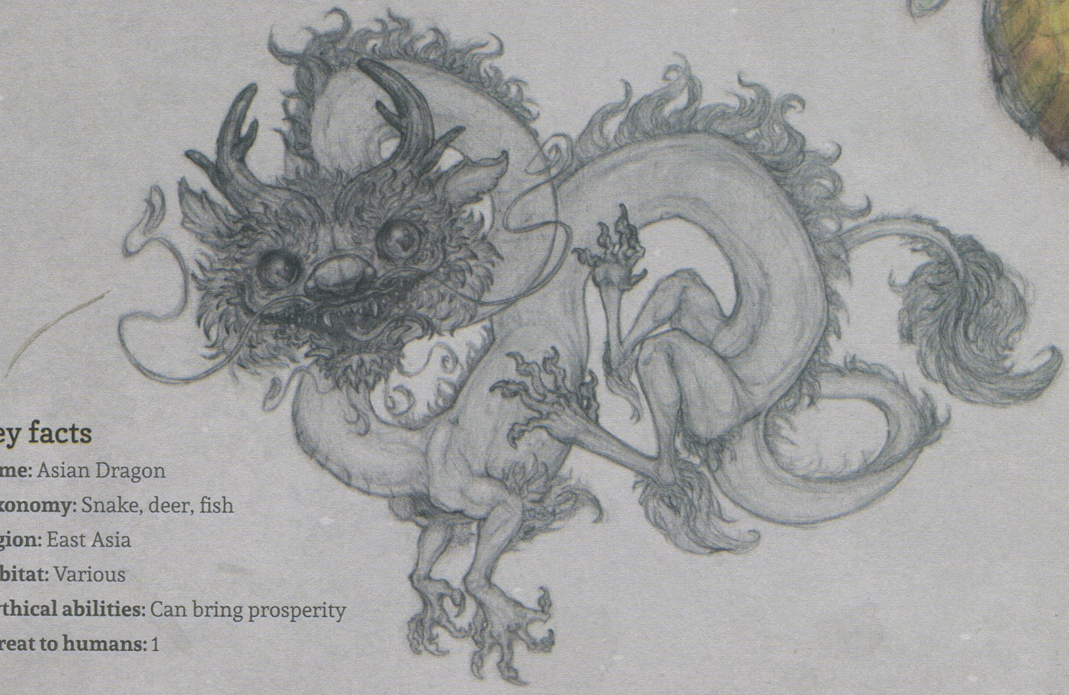


• FINAL DESIGN •

The process of documentation, research, and analysis led me to this final design. I brought the far right hind leg forward before the body, giving the dragon a more graceful and flexible appearance. I also added some more whiskers to its chin to give it an elegant touch.

I chose vivid colors, the base being yellow, inspired by the traditional golden color of some imperial Chinese dragons. The result is a dragon with an easily recognizable silhouette and a posture conveying elegance and agility. It has a sympathetic face and eyes, without leaving aside that fiery, imposing look conveyed by the fanged jaws. The mane and abundant hair that runs down the dragon's back and tail give it a sense of majesty.

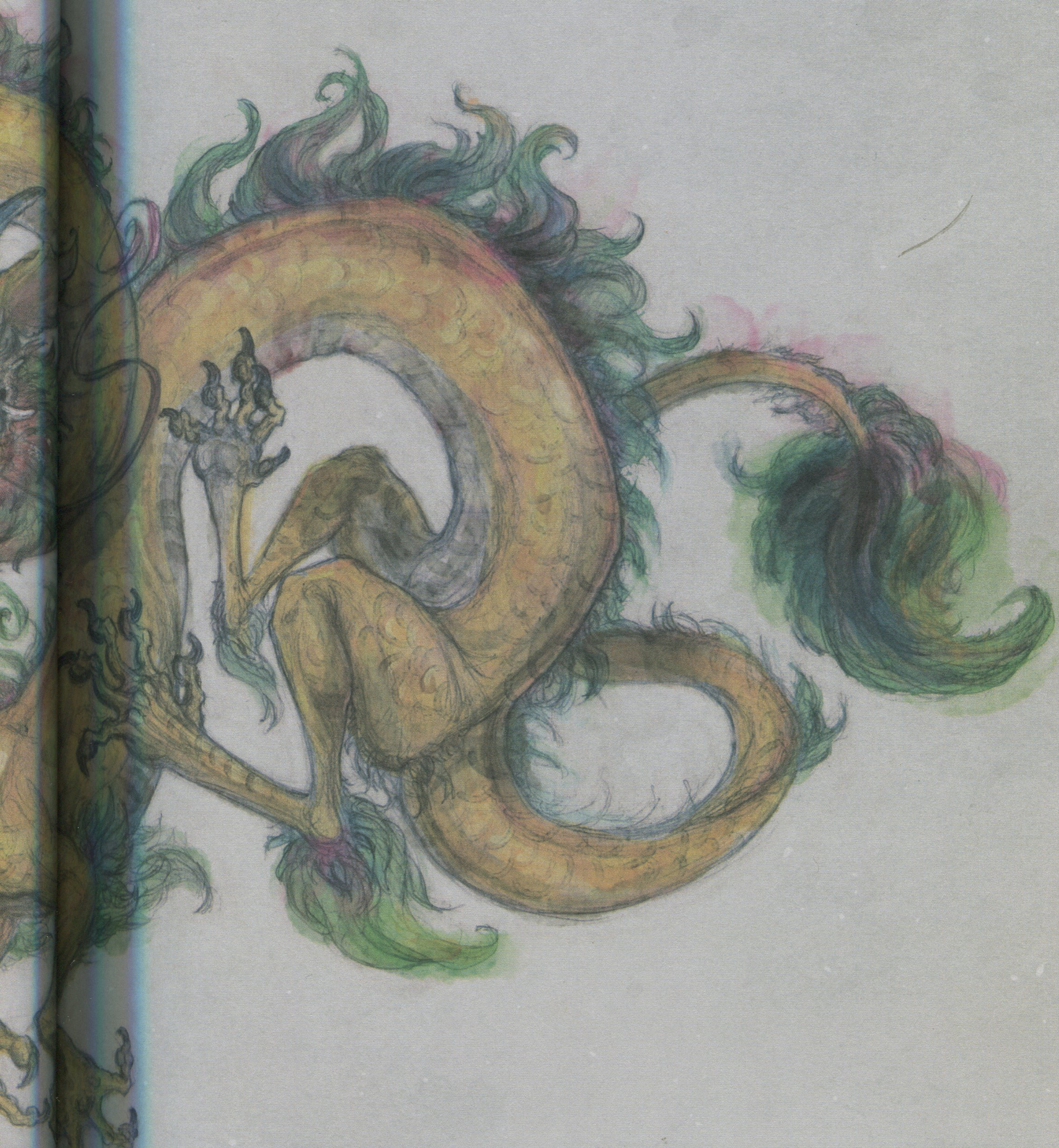


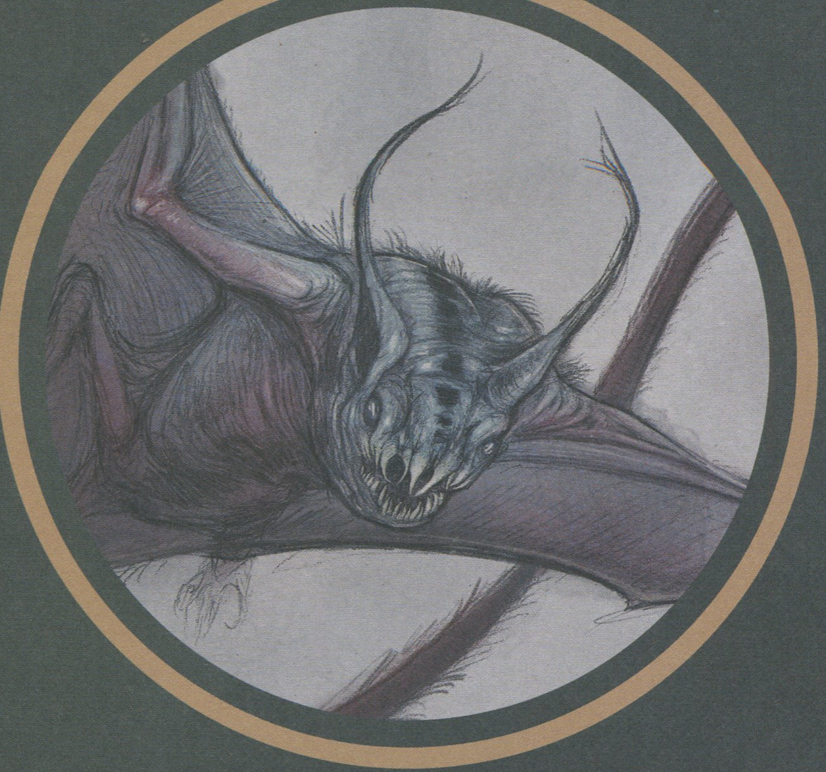


Key facts

Name: Asian Dragon
Taxonomy: Snake, deer, fish
Region: East Asia
Habitat: Various
Mythical abilities: Can bring prosperity
Threat to humans: 1

Final image © Ulksy





• ASWANG •

According to Filipino folklore, the aswang is a shapeshifter that walks around by day as a human and turns into a bloodthirsty creature at nigh The name comes from a Sanskrit word meaning "demon." Often described as a bat- or crow-like creature once it has transformed, stories an recollections vary widely, although common themes include vampiric, bloodsucking tendencies; indeed, some believe that they can be warne away with garlic and holy water as would be the case with a more European depiction of a vampire. Like checking a mirror to see if a vampire ha a reflection, you can also check if a person is an aswang by bending down and peering at them through your legs.

• ARTHUR RODRIGUEZ •

3D artist • instagram.com/videogameartist1321

• FIELD NOTES •

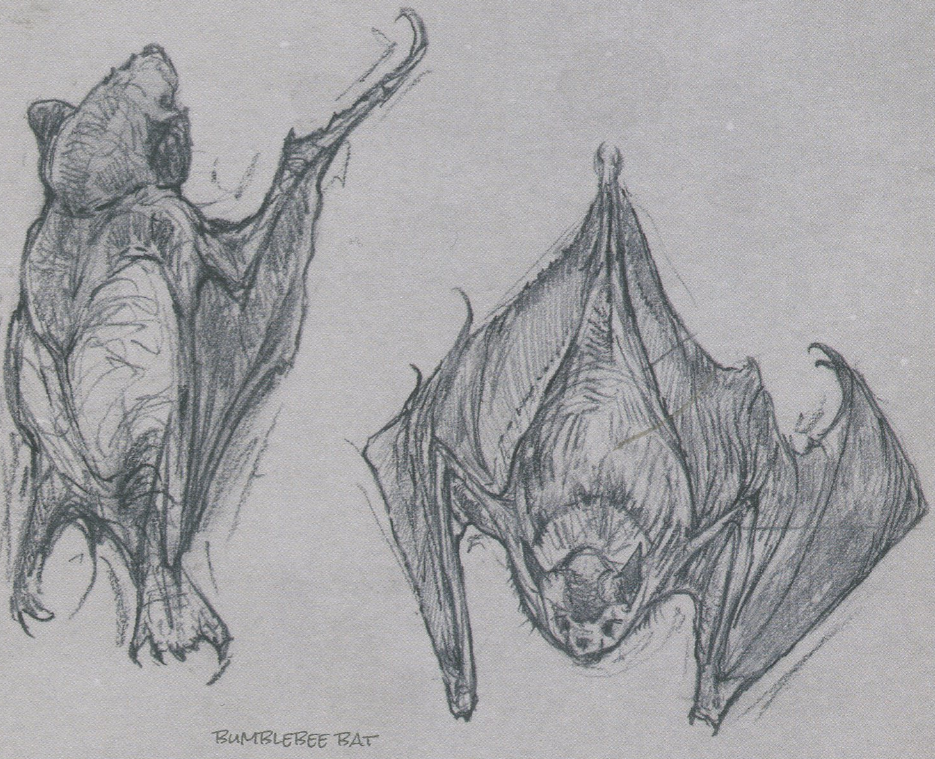
Bats

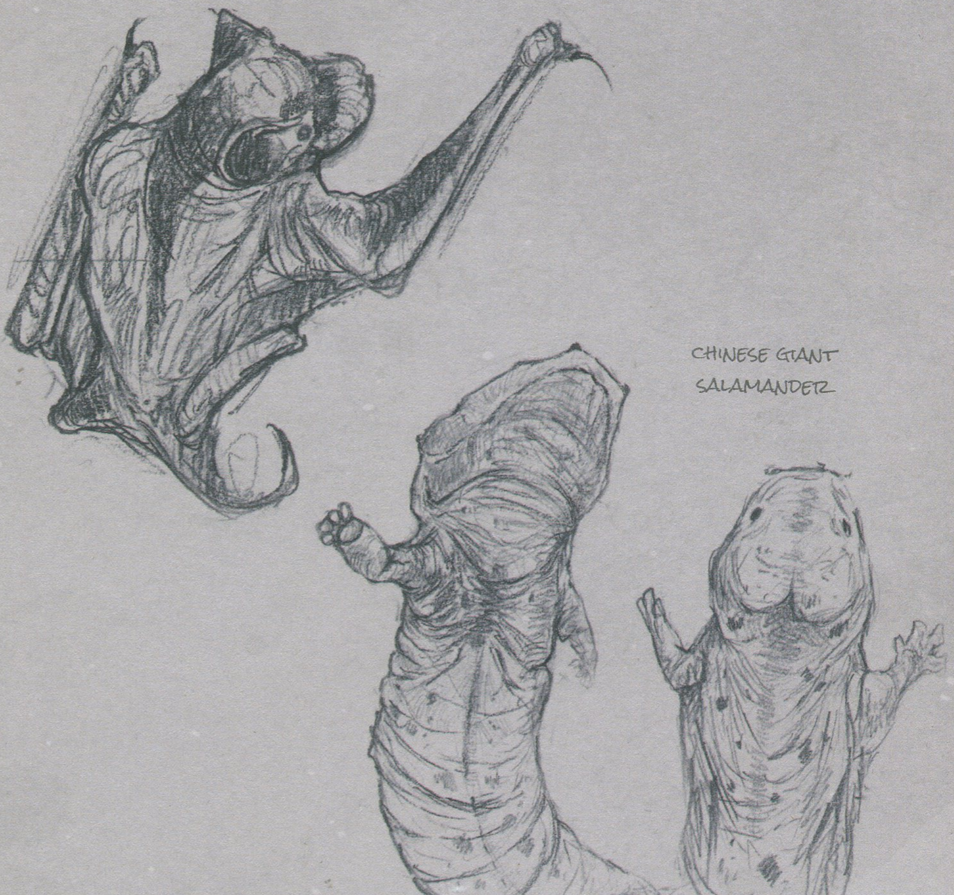
Making the most of the rumored vampiric elements of this creature, I focus on the head and back of a bat, as my final design will show the aswang in its transformed state. The head of a bat is very small and fragile looking, which I would like to take forward into the thumbnails for the aswang. I looked to the bumblebee bat (also known as the hog-nosed bat) for the sketches shown here. I want to familiarize myself with the structure and shapes of this creature. I observe the teardrop form of the body and the round, fat midsection compared to its bony limbs. I want the aswang design to be based on what nature has already provided, while allowing myself the freedom to be creative.

The frail limbs and bony forms of the bat are my favorite part of the animal. They give a feeling of both creepiness and elegance at the same time, which is a fascinating combination to capture. The skin on the wings is surprisingly thin looking. Observing bats walking and flying is also mesmerizing. The almost arm-like wings that can be used for walking as well as flying add a sense of wonder to the animal, so I would like to introduce this into the aswang design.

Chinese giant salamander

To ensure the aswang design has a creepy element to it, I want to give it soft and malleable skin. I imagine the tropical climate to be perfect for an aswang that needs to stay damp in order to maintain healthy skin; it gets all the water it needs by absorbing dew. The skin of the Chinese giant salamander, also known as the hellbender, will be perfect for this. Its skin is wet and wrinkled, with a coat of mucus on it. I want to really capture the way the skin sags and hangs from the bone, with both fine and large wrinkles. Hellbenders thrash around like fish, so I imagine the aswang using this type of evasive movement if it was ever grabbed by a predator.



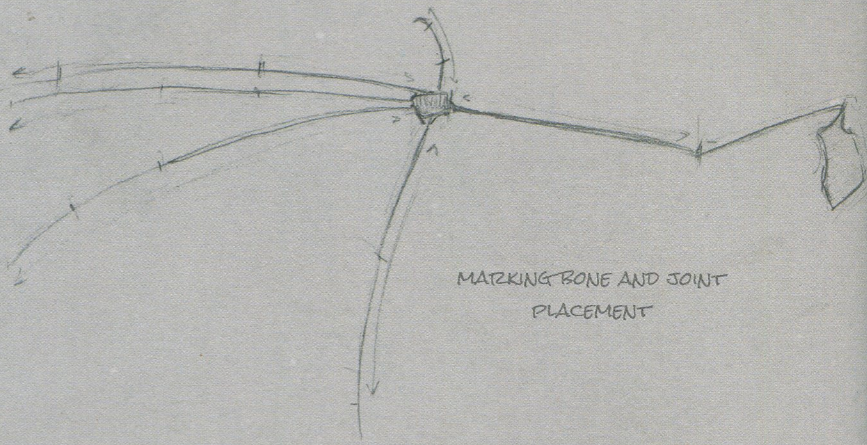


Bat wings

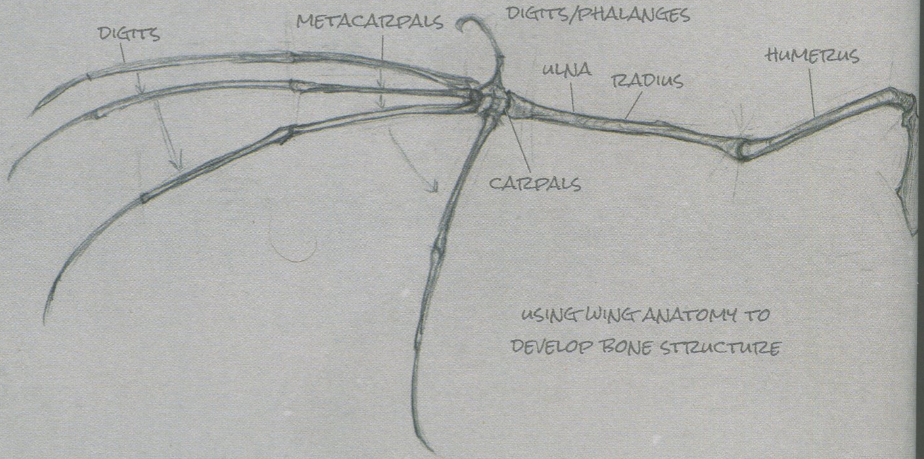
The wings of a bat are so simple to draw and that is what can make them so complicated. When drawing bat-like wings it is important to understand the form and placement of the most basic shapes. I use lines and angular shapes for bone placement while adding markers where the joints would go. This is more crucial than adding any detail at this stage.

After I have studied the placement and simple structure of the bat wing anatomy, I then turn those simple lines into bone. Using the basic lines as guides I start to lightly draw the bones on top of the markers. I make sure that as I lay down the lines for the bones I do not make them perfectly straight. Nothing is straight or perfect in nature so I add pits and crooked parts to the bones to make them believable. Who knows what type of life this animal has lived, or what predators it has had to fight for survival.

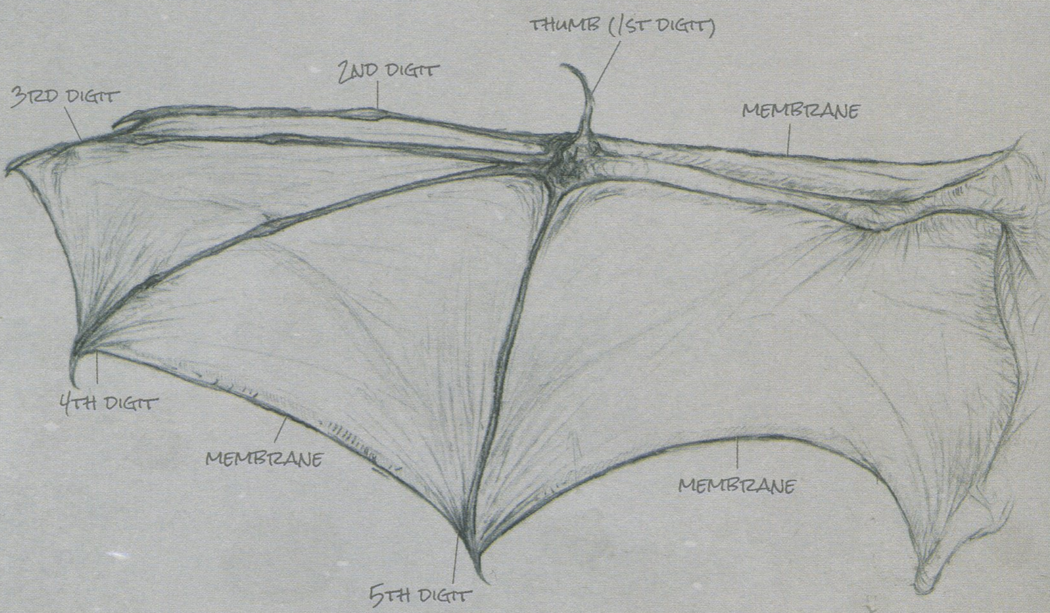
After bones comes the skin. When drawing the skin of the wing I keep the lines light; this will suggest a thin surface. Skin becomes taut around the knuckles and joints of the bat, so I use a variety of line weights to convey this. I use a light line to mimic the soft skin that is being pulled, and use a darker line to show the skin folding onto itself. Line weight is very important when creating skin details.



MARKING BONE AND JOINT PLACEMENT



USING WING ANATOMY TO DEVELOP BONE STRUCTURE



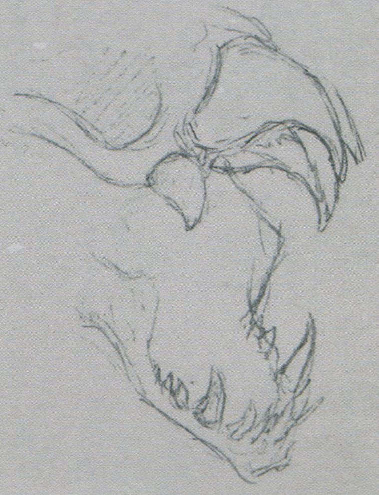
ADDING SKIN WITH VARYING LINE WEIGHTS

Vampiric teeth

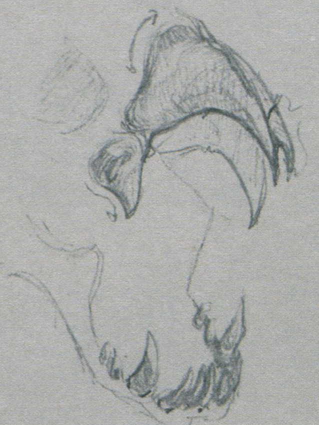
I imagine that when the aswang finally finds a victim, it slices a small wound using its massive, sharp teeth, which allow it to cut through the thickest of hides. I therefore want to look at the teeth in more detail. I follow the same rule of simplicity for the teeth as I did for the wing, keeping the lines simple and focusing on placement and form. Teeth are actually quite organic so as I lay down the lines I keep them active and fluid. This will give each tooth unique properties that will prevent them from looking too uniform and artificial.

The teeth of a vampire bat are like small blades that cut into the flesh of the creature it feeds on. Once the lines are drawn I use cross-hatching to display the form of the surface. I see a lot of people draw the same flat, pointed shape for teeth of all animal types. Teeth have a unique purpose and should be drawn as such. For vampire-bat teeth I want to round out the main cutting teeth. I shade the bottom part of the teeth with thicker lines and the top with light lines to give them volume.

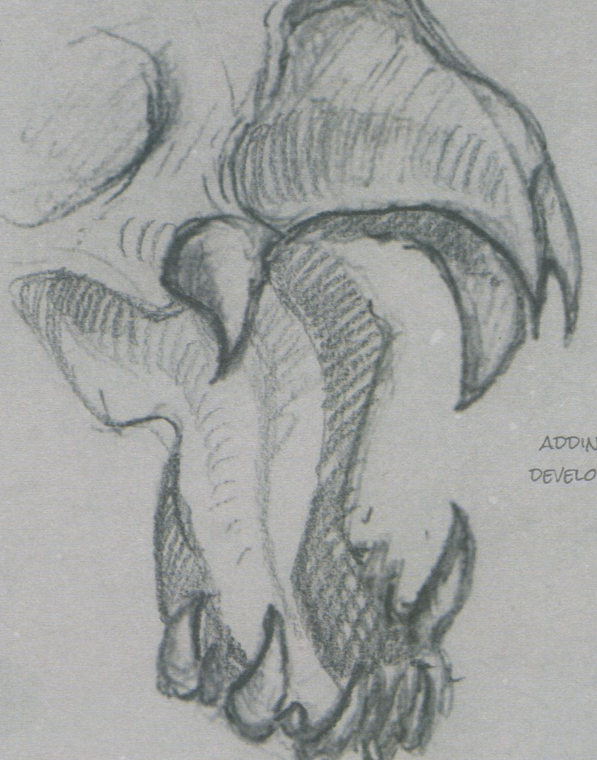
Once all the forms and surface texture are there, I add highlights to further develop the forms the teeth have taken. For example, rather than the teeth being smooth I want them to have pits and grooves so they look well used. Using a kneaded eraser I remove areas of the sketch I want to add highlights to, leaving other parts intact to suggest the surface. I am careful not to erase any texture and line work so that I do not lose the form of the sketch.



USING FLOWING LINES FOR ORGANIC TEETH



BUILDING VOLUME



ADDING HIGHLIGHTS TO DEVELOP DIMENSIONALITY

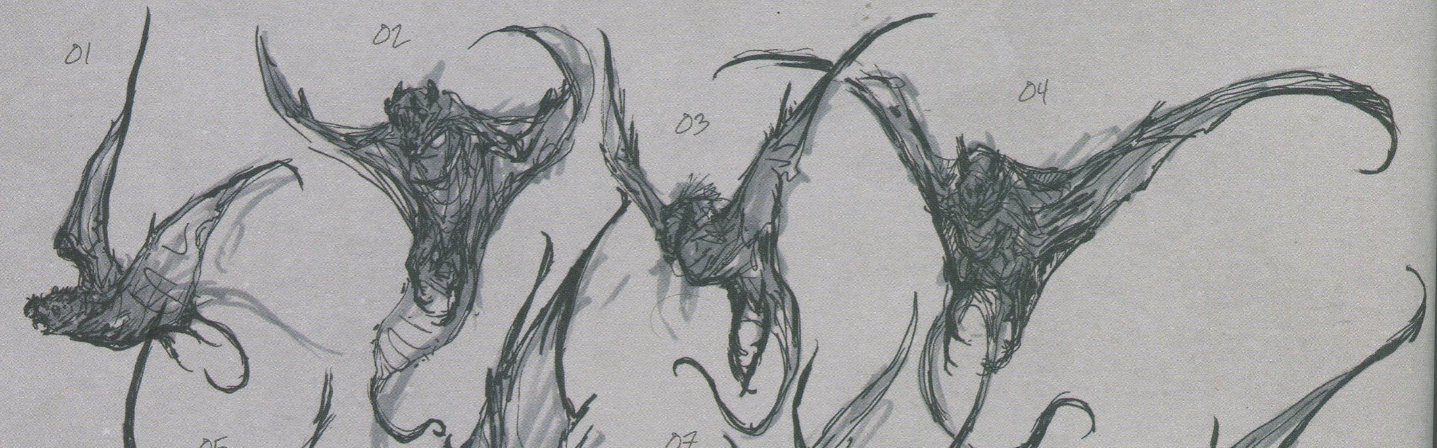
• DESIGN PROCESS •

Thumbnails

I knew I wanted the aswang to be bat-like so I kept this in mind as I started the thumbnail process. Thumbnails are usually not seen by anyone but the artist; you can think of a sketchbook or piece of paper as a journal, with all of your ideas on paper and nobody to judge but yourself.

For this reason I was as imaginative and wild as I could be, making sure I threw lines and shapes all over the page. I really wanted to capture a sense of life, so gestural drawing worked well for this. I needed an active pose for this creature, so thumbnails showing it just before landing or mid-flight would work best.

As you can see, I sketched the majority of the thumbnails as the beast in mid-flight so I could consider wing position; however, I made sure I captured the creature as a whole in order to avoid becoming caught up in one area, as I needed to develop the head and body shape too. I imagine the aswang as a creepy critter so I wanted to give the design a mix of thick and thin elements. I played around with the length of the head and different body types to discover what worked best. Odd-looking proportions add to the unearthly feel. The pointed curves of the tail and wings give the designs an unfriendly, threatening appearance.

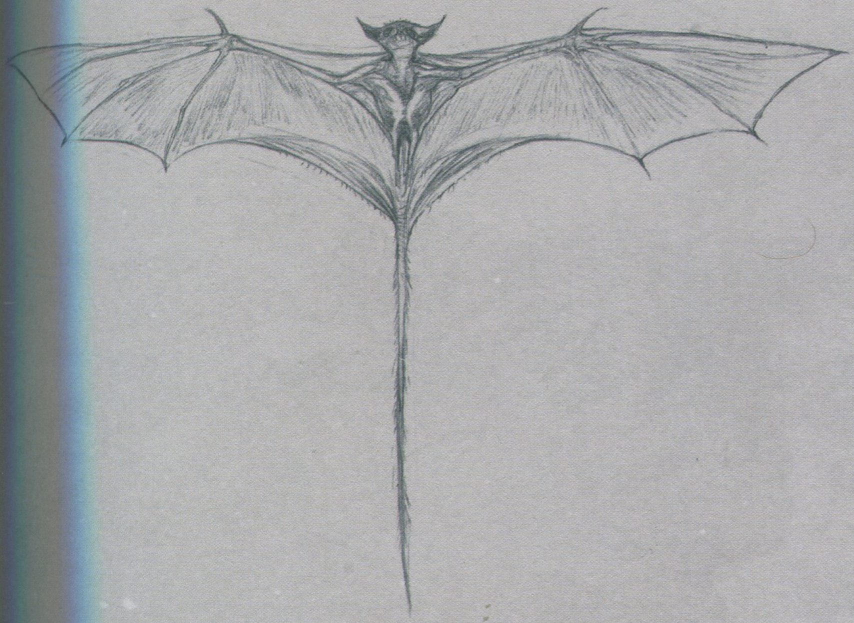


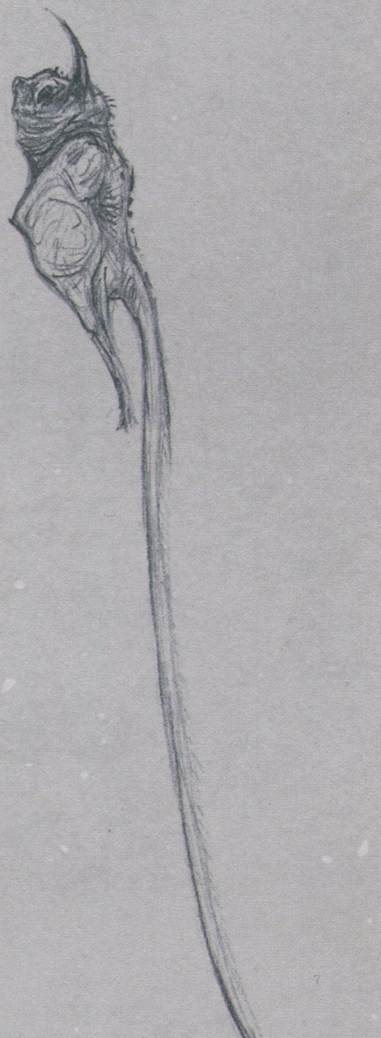
Further exploration

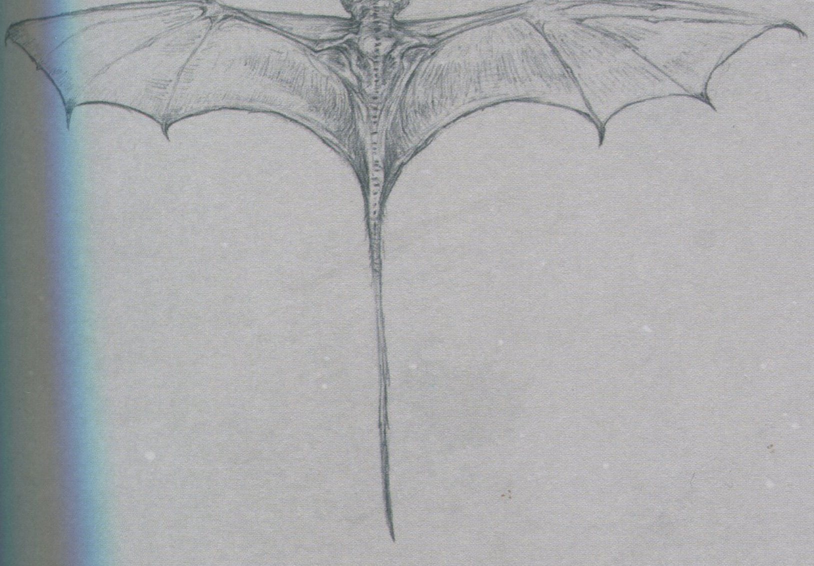
Looking at the aswang from the front you can see the thin nature of the body and its almost sickly appearance. This helps create the impression of a pestilent creature you would not want anywhere near you. The thin tail, which is almost as long as the wing span, gives the beast an unearthly feel. I need to address the position of the feet and how they attach to the wings in order to make the anatomy more believable. I will also make the head rounder as the flat head with pointed ears here almost looks cute rather than terrifying.

As we take a look at the back of the creature you can see the bony structure developed from the research stage. Showing the bones of the back and the arms really adds to the gaunt, unwholesome feel. The spindly digits that help form the wings look quite disturbing with their thin, angular forms, while the claws have a needle-sharp appearance. For this sketch I paid attention to the skin folds by the tail and how the skin pulls away from the shoulder blades. The hands need to be a bit smaller to fit with the creature's proportions.

Taking a glance at the creature from the side you can gain a sense of how small it really is as you observe the tail relative to the body. Size was on my mind when I thought of this creature and it being an animal of the night. I also saw that I needed to move the ears a bit further back and change the face position so it had a more demonic feel. The eye looks cold, black, and inhuman.

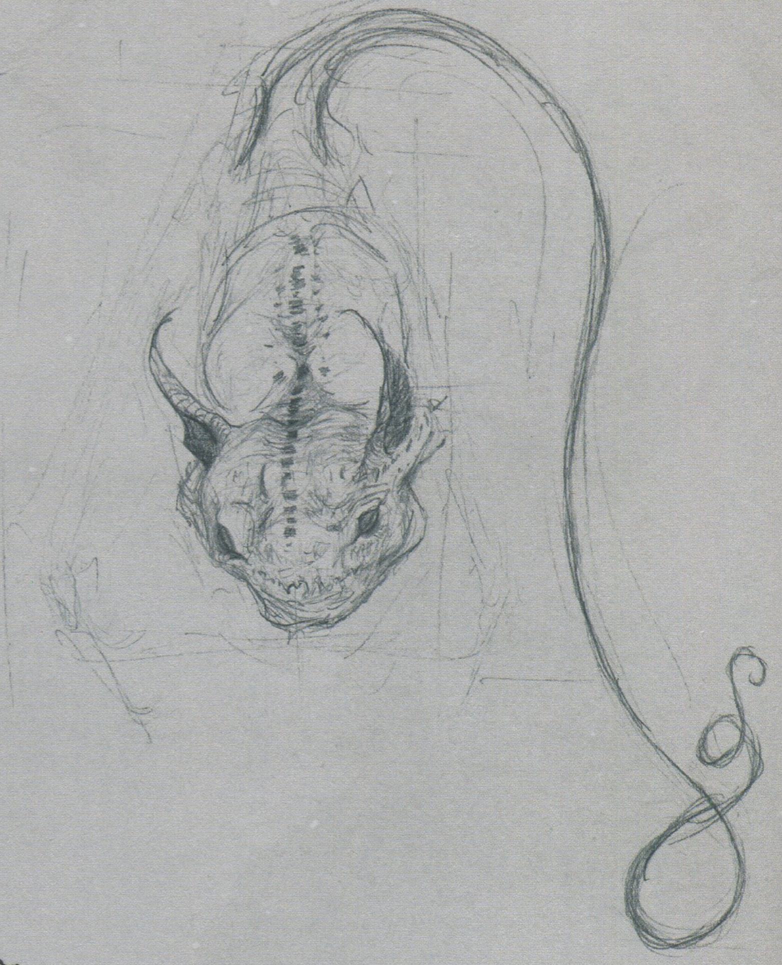




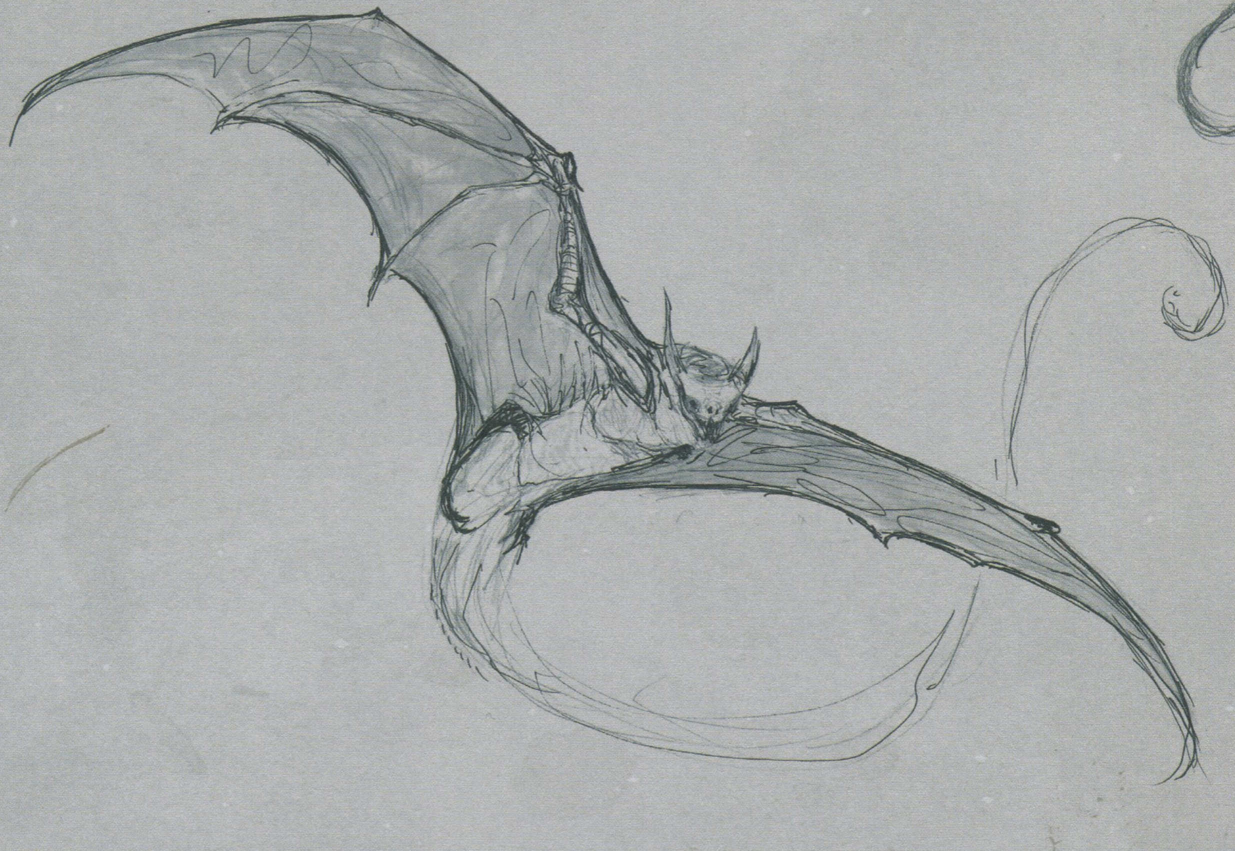


Poses

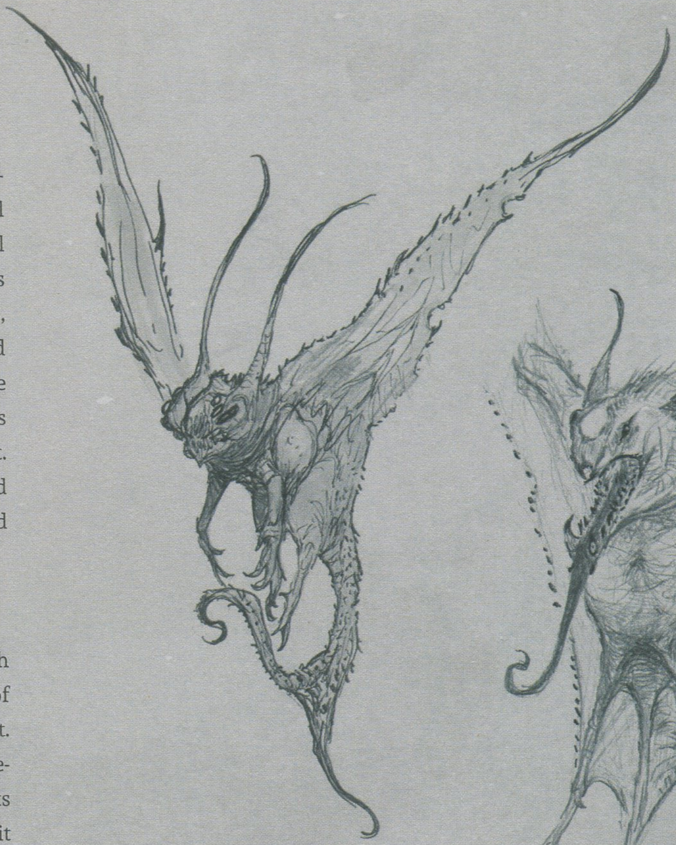
I needed to develop the face further so I first worked on a pose where the head faced downward slightly, which you can see on the right here. I like the idea of showing off a menacing grin with a bit of saliva dripping from the mouth, which would be open a little in order to give a hint of the sharp teeth. This could work well as a pose for the final design, as if the aswang is looking down on its prey from above, ready to pounce. However, I do not like that the chest and small cavities of the body are hidden from view, as these are particularly disturbing features of the bat-like beast.

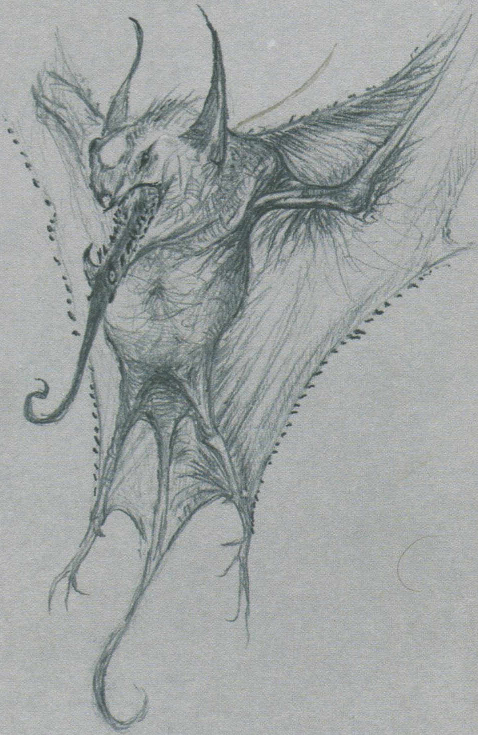


As soon as I started sketching the rough second pose shown below, I immediately felt it presented a better perspective for the creature. It shows off the variation in the anatomy of the body, limbs, and head. This angle also offers more options for interesting skin folds, which I need to help convey the feeling of something ghoulish. I note that I need to round out the head for the final drawing as well as move it down slightly.



• SUBSPECIES •





Plutonian aswang

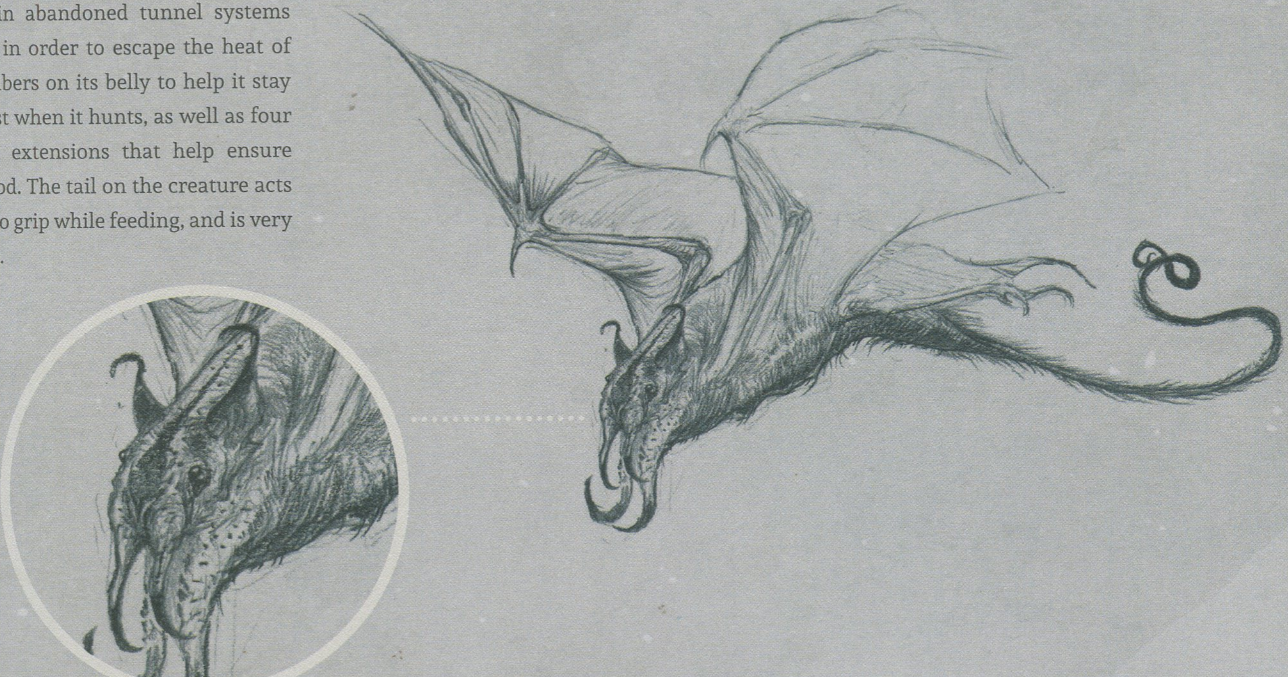
This rarely seen breed of aswang has an extra-terrestrial appearance. While its head may still look bat-like, the elongated antennae and split tail look like something not from this planet. Whereas the common aswang's arms are part of its wings, this distant cousin has separate, more developed arms in addition to larger legs, giving it a more insect-like appearance. This allows it to pick up its prey and eat it in the safety of its own environment. Its teeth are reminiscent of a cookie cutter, used for taking small chunks of flesh followed by blood from the host.

Cave aswang

This subspecies is typically found in caves, much like its bat ancestors. Fur covers the majority of the creature's body to help keep it warm at night. It possesses an extended bottom jaw with rake-like teeth that it scrapes across the surface of its sleeping victim. After taking away layers of flesh it is able to lap up the blood with its long, thin tongue that coils up under the skull.

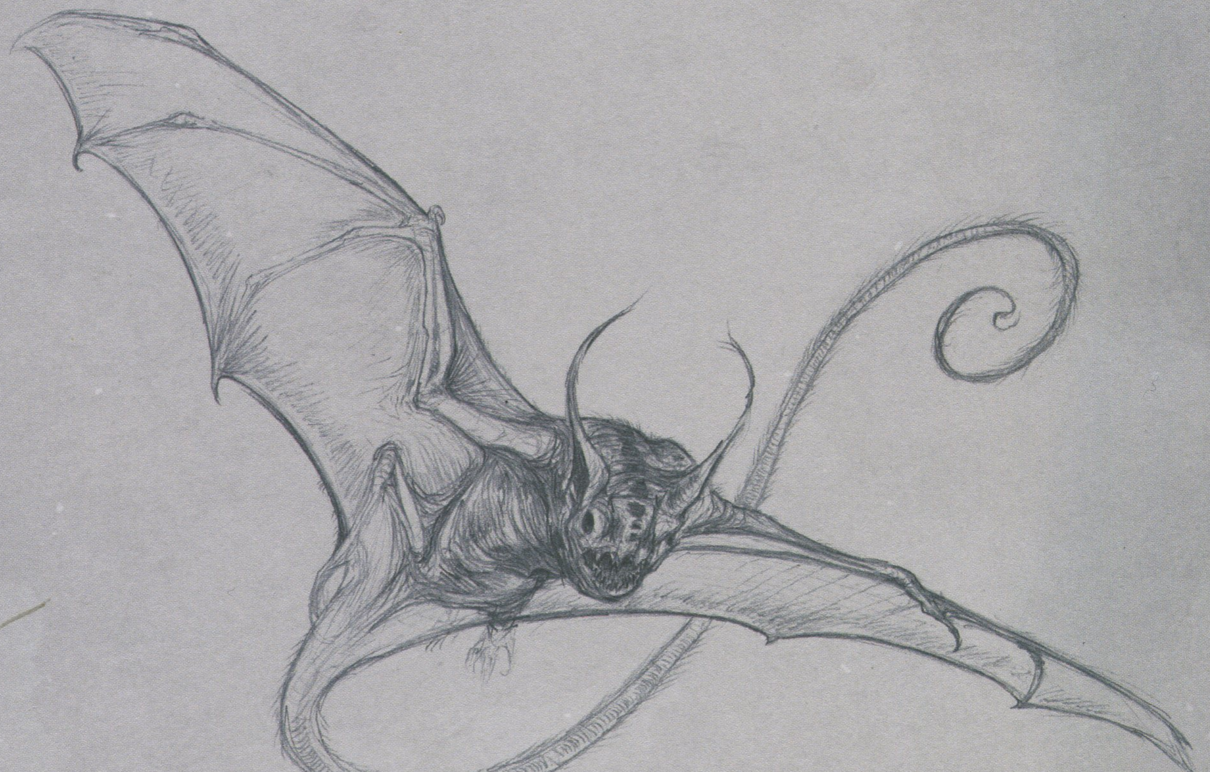
Desert aswang

This member of the aswang family is a desert dweller, sleeping in abandoned tunnel systems of other creatures in order to escape the heat of day. It has sticky fibers on its belly to help it stay attached to the host when it hunts, as well as four needle-like mouth extensions that help ensure delivery of the blood. The tail on the creature acts like an extra limb to grip while feeding, and is very strong and flexible.



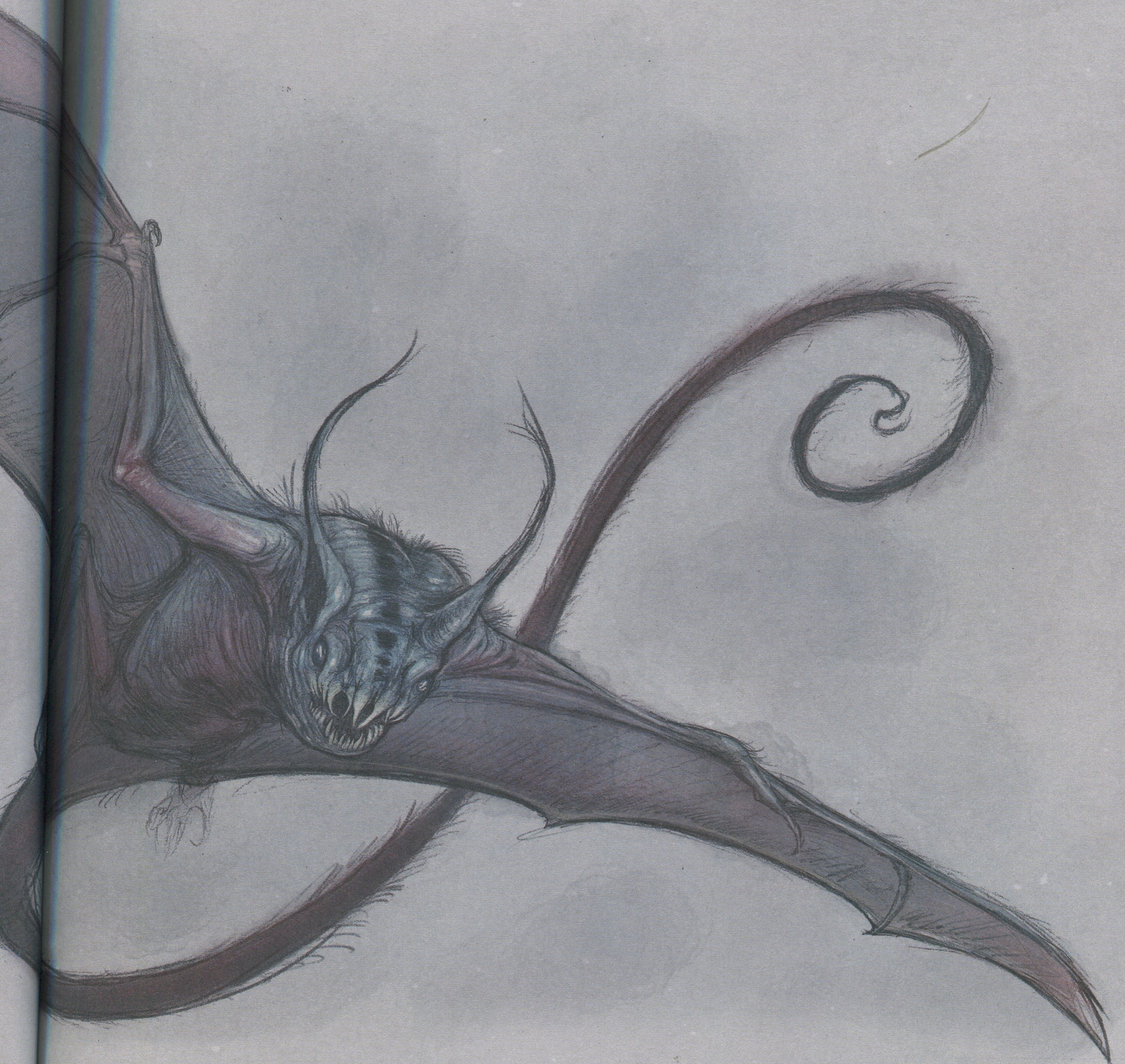
• FINAL DESIGN •

In the final design you can see that the transformed aswang is a small, creepy, and bloodthirsty creature. Vampiric in its bat-like and terrifying appearance, it uses its larger front teeth to rip open wounds for feeding as the smaller teeth on the bottom help to maintain a tight hold. The emaciated body of the aswang allows it to bend and squeeze itself into small spaces as it searches and waits for its next victim. A small body and a large head helps with portraying odd proportions, which I really liked from the thumbnail sketches. The sharp claws and bones of the wings, which almost look like skeletal human fingers, are very unnerving.

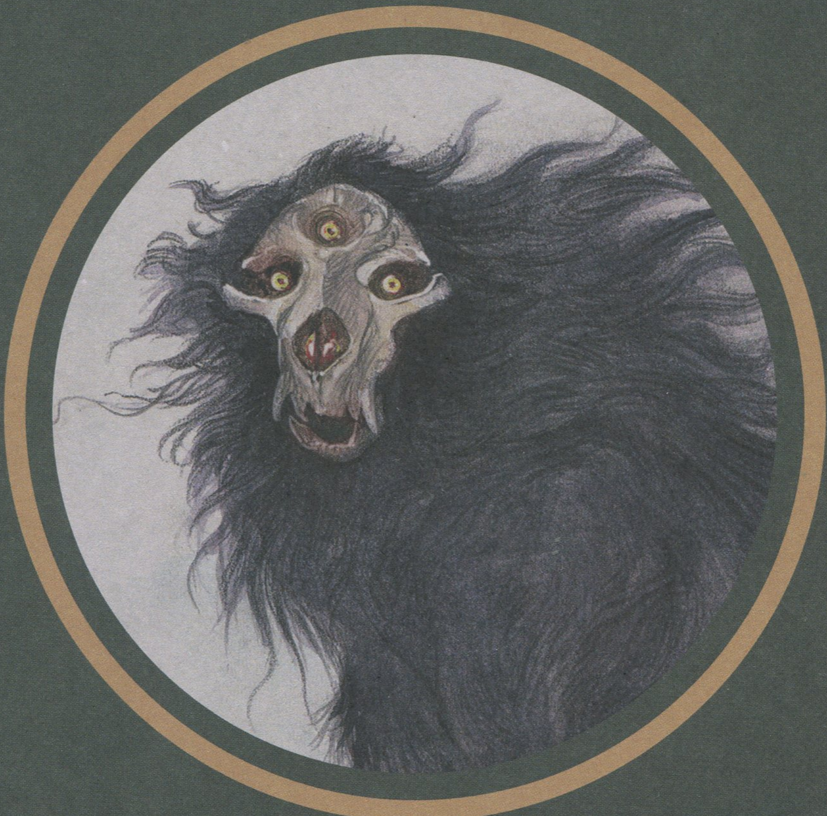


Key facts

Name: Aswang
Taxonomy: Bat, human
Region: Philippines
Habitat: Villages, towns
Mythical abilities: Shapeshifter, bloodsucker
Threat to humans: 5



Final image © Arthur Rodriguez



• BARGHEST •

The barghest is an elusive species of large canid (member of the dog family) endemic to the northern regions of the British Isles. As of this date no specimen has been formally described, but reliable witnesses have provided a number of reports with which mythological zoologists can form a basic outline of the species. The barghest is immediately recognizable by its large size, dark coat, and glowing eyes. It is thought to be nocturnal, as it has only been seen at night, usually in the vicinity of crossroads, narrow alleys, or passageways within its territory. The origin of the name is thought to be of the combination *burh-ghest* (town-ghost), a reference to the creature's territorial nature. Individual barghests have limited territories, likely dictated by a strict social hierarchy. Many are known by local names, such as Black Shuck, Hairy Jack, and Skriker Their taxonomy is slightly murky, but several well-documented sightings in northern Europe lend credence to the theory that there are several subspecies. Eyewitness reports describe the barghest as largely non-aggressive unless provoked, neither seeking out humans nor avoiding them Strangely, reports of the creature have often coincided with recent deaths.

• TIFFANY TURRILL •

Illustrator • tiffanyturrill.com

• FIELD NOTES •

Skulls

The barghest is an ambiguous creature with the potential to be aggressive, so I will begin by doing some quick studies of other large canids – wolves and Irish wolfhounds. The skulls of both are long, with pronounced sharp teeth, small eyes, and pronounced zygomatic processes (cheekbones). As with many mammalian skulls, the eye sockets appear large but they house relatively small, forward-facing eyeballs. I will pay special attention to the angles and shape of the jaw. The cranial structure will inform the final designs by creating a threatening yet mysterious face.

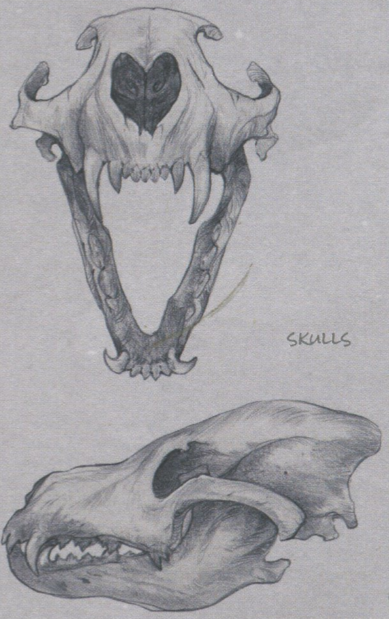
Wolfhounds

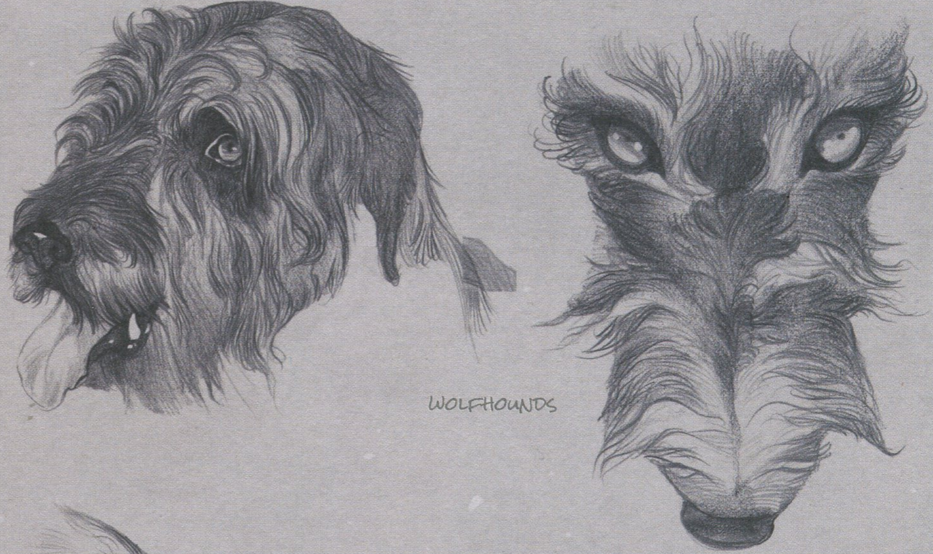
I want the barghest to convey otherworldliness without becoming completely unrecognizable from the base inspiration of a large dog. The Irish wolfhound is an extremely large breed of dog that has been specifically bred to hunt small animals over rugged terrain similar to that of the barghest's region. They have coarse and wiry fur and a long face, which at first glance appears to be the perfect reference for the barghest; however, over time breeding has resulted in friendly, open faces that work against the intimidating look I want to create.

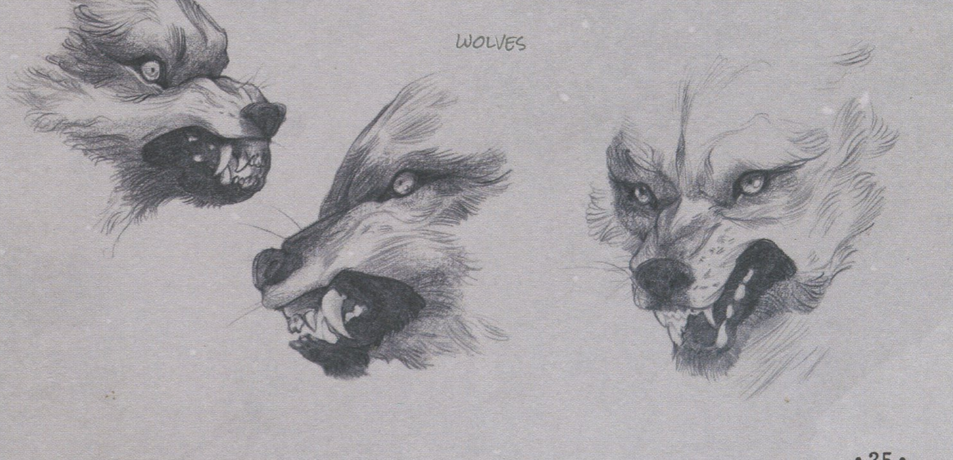
The wolfhound presents a more interesting portrait from different angles. Examining the face tilted down highlights the bright, round eyes and provides more contrast where the eyebrows are hooded and accented with shaggy hair. The barghest's piercing gaze is one of the primary features of the beast and sketches from this angle provide a good exercise in creating an arresting canid face. However, the friendly dog-like features – shaggy muzzle and floppy ears – offset this effect so further exploration is still needed.

Wolves

Wolves are very socially complex and have adapted expressive faces to communicate with others in their pack. The aggressive display of wolves is startling and could be useful in developing an intimidating face design for the barghest. When a wolf snarls the muscles along the jaws contract, pulling the skin along the eyes back. The skin along the nose wrinkles and pulls the lips up to reveal the sharp front teeth. They have deep black gums which contrast heavily with the white teeth. All of these elements create a primal, arresting image that is immediately recognizable as a threat.





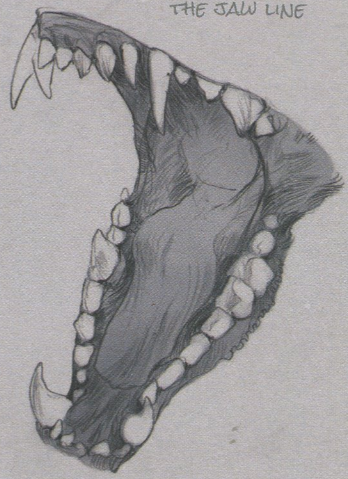


Predatory teeth

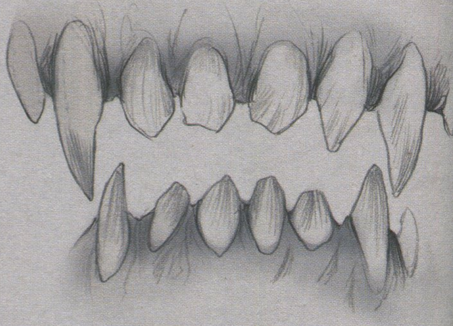
The teeth of most mammalian predators are very specialized – the front teeth are designed to be long and pointed for grabbing and holding onto struggling prey, while the wider, spiked molars in the back interlock when the animal bites down, shearing the meat. The jaw line helps to determine the face shape of the barghest, so I sometimes start by creating a quick mockup of the open jaws using only minimal detail. It is important to remember that much of the actual tooth is hidden within the gums and to pay attention to the arrangement of the teeth.

The front teeth of the barghest should be of particular focus. It is useful to look at the dentition (arrangement and characteristics of teeth) from a different angle. When rendering teeth close-up the gaps between them are obvious and the shapes are gently pointed. However, it is important not to overdo this because, as surprising as it may be, large predators' teeth are not truly pointed. Much of the damage created by a carnivorous mammal's teeth is not caused by the sharpness but rather the bite force created by the powerful muscles which support the jaw.

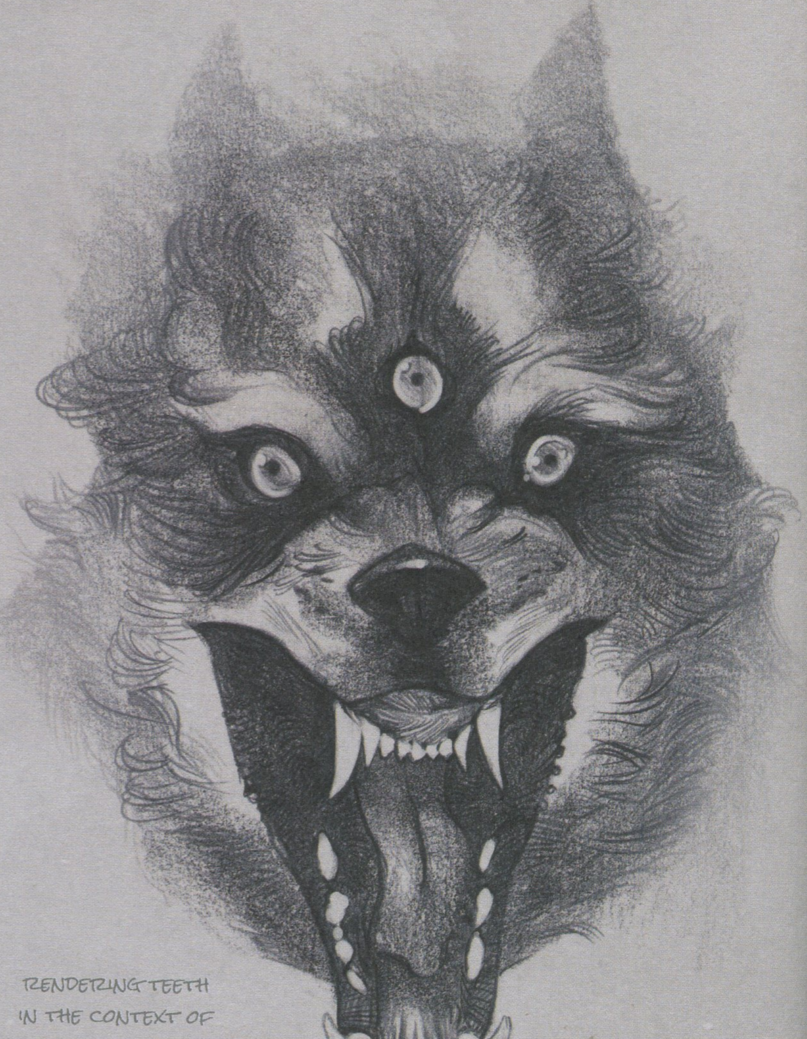
Dentition is the easiest way to determine the ultimate lifestyle of any animal because it serves as a basic toolkit for their survival. In this way, teeth cannot truly be separated from the overall shape of the jaw, which naturally defines the shape of the face and the overall look of that creature's face. When rendering large teeth from a distance, I focus on keeping the shapes organic but structured; too much detail will create visual distraction. I blend the shapes together to suggest many complex structures and use contrast with the other mouth parts to highlight the teeth themselves.



FOCUSING ON THE JAW LINE



CLOSE-UP DENTITION



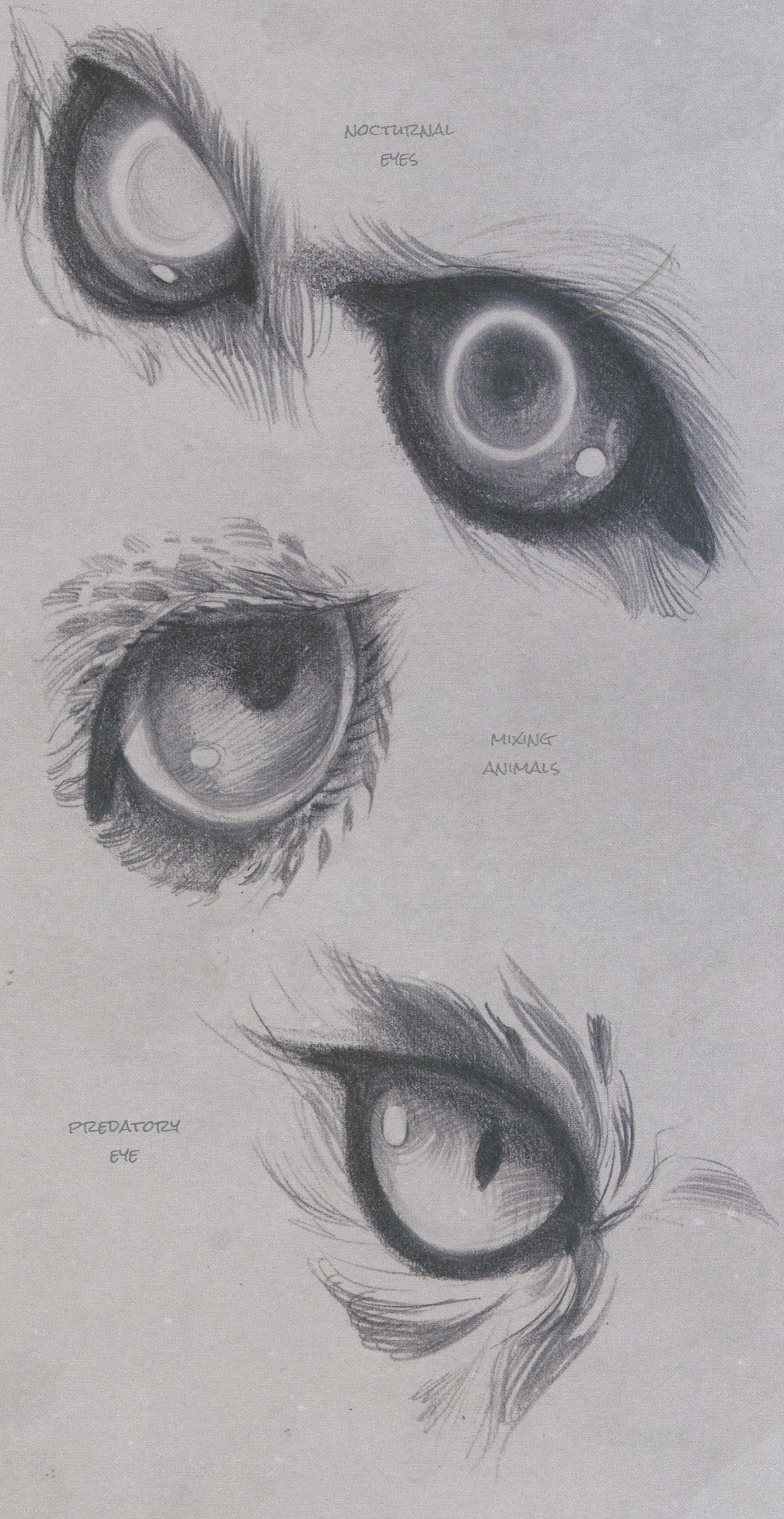
RENDERING TEETH IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FACE

Predatory eyes

The primary feature consistently reported from sightings of the barghest is that of its piercing, almost fiery eyes. When creating an arresting eye design, it is helpful to refer to existing eyes of real creatures – the variety of which is staggering. Since the barghest is nocturnal it might be interesting if its eyes have a natural luminescent quality. In real life, the glowing effect of eyes at night is created by a reflective layer on an animal's sclera (the white part of the eye). I play with various layers of dark and light to create the impression of complex structures within the eye.

I also try pairing different features from completely unrelated groups of animals to create an unnatural look. Due to the tremendous variety of optic structures within the animal kingdom it is important to blend mismatched features as seamlessly as possible, otherwise there is a risk of creating a sloppy Frankenstein's monster-look that will not feel cohesive. I could try using a large bird eye within a mammalian socket, for example, and highlight the complex scales and structures within the eye using delicate line grouping. It is important to analyze the end look to see if it is intense and frightening.

Sometimes keeping things simple is the best option. The gaze of large mammalian predators tends to produce a primal response in many people. A predator's eyes are bright and clear with small centered and contracted pupils. Mammals are expressive and their eyes will often be widened if they are conveying either fear or aggression. It is therefore important to remember that eyeballs are housed behind and partially concealed by the eyelids and that the eyebrows hang above the top of the eye, casting a shadow over it.



• DESIGN PROCESS •

Thumbnails

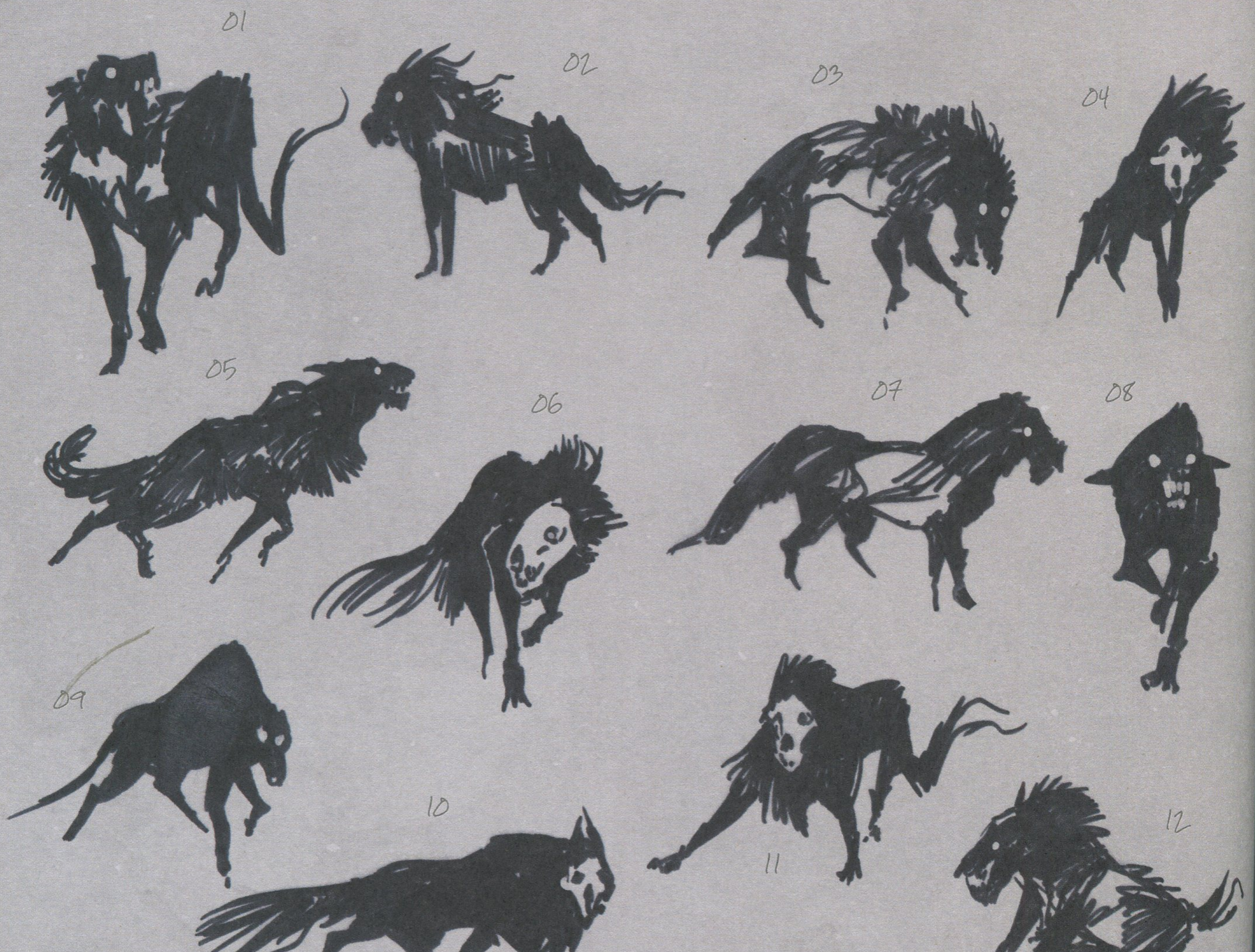
My final work is often heavy in terms of details and uses many fine lines, so when I begin thumbnailing general shapes, I prefer to use a thick, dark marker because this allows me to focus on the gesture while I block in the basic silhouettes in a noncommittal way.

I started with some basic dog-like shapes reminiscent of the wolfhound; I played around to see which angles and poses convey the mysterious but potentially threatening look I wanted it to impart.

Long legs suggest a confident, agile creature, but by playing with leg length and proportions the creature becomes a bit more ungainly, similar to the look of a hyena. By extending the length of the shoulder blades while pitching the head down I gave the barghest a skulking gait, while elongating the tail added a sleekness that resulted in an overall threatening profile.

I hinted at the eyes by leaving them blank for several sketches. Keeping in mind the idea that the barghest is often associated with death, in some sketches I gave the entire face a skull-like appearance without any of the shaggy dark fur. I thought this might be the direction that was needed to keep the final design familiar but with an otherworldly feel.

As I worked I tried to keep my wrist lightly locked as this allows my movements to come from the elbow and shoulder; this is a technique taught in observational drawing classes to keep forms fluid, and prevents you from being precious when refining your sketches.

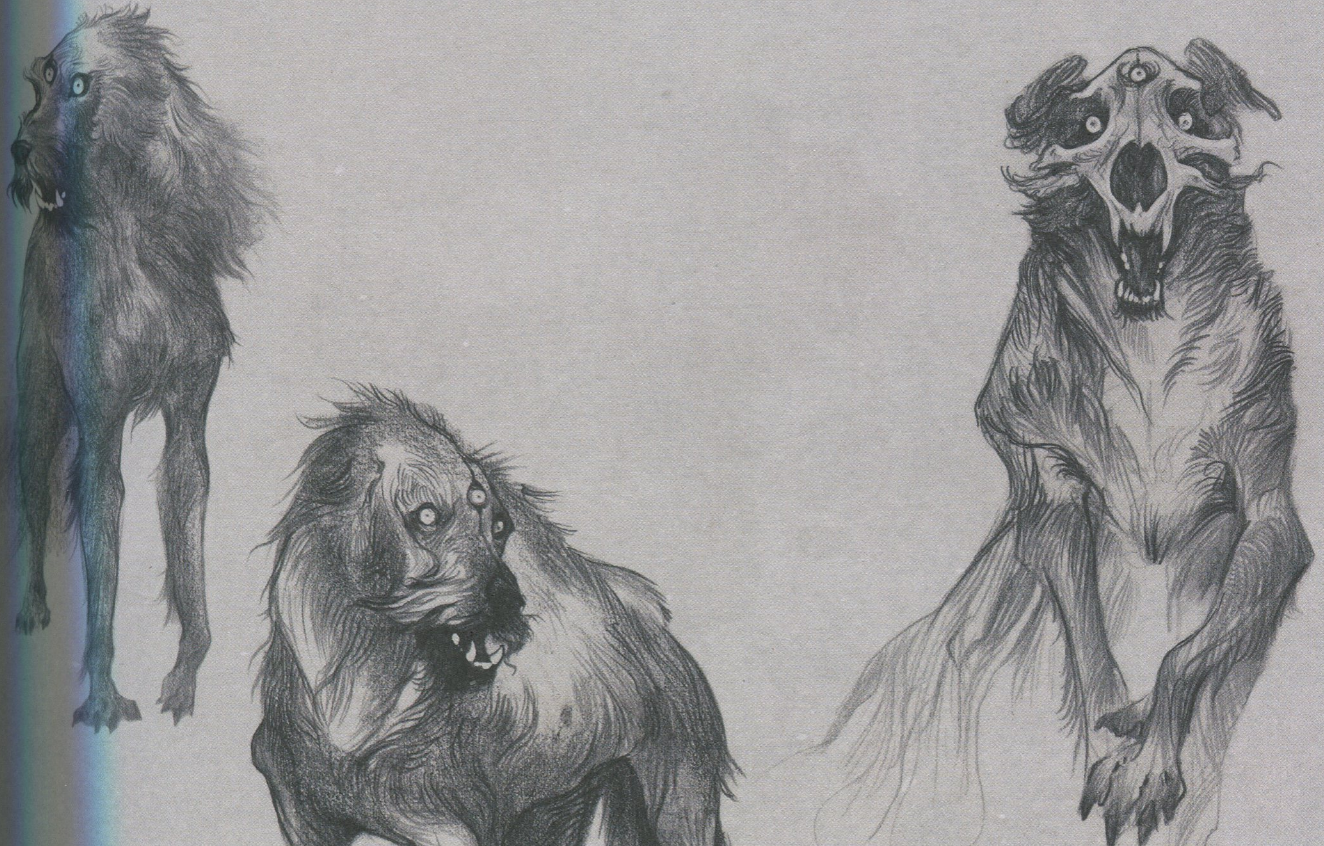


Further exploration

Using my thumbnails as a guide, I wanted to explore different options to help with the final design and play with different facial features, which I felt were unresolved. The first sketch below starts the exploration from a fairly uncomplicated vantage point, emphasizing the lanky legs and dog-like profile.

The overall proportions are revealed more with the second sketch, along with a better view of the length and texture of the tail. This view emphasizes the thickness of the trunk and neck musculature while giving a good three-quarter view of the face. I added a third eye to the forehead to act as an immediate indicator that the creature is no ordinary dog but a supernatural one. The lines took on some interesting shapes, emphasizing the cheekbones and highlighting the single line along the third eye atop the skull.

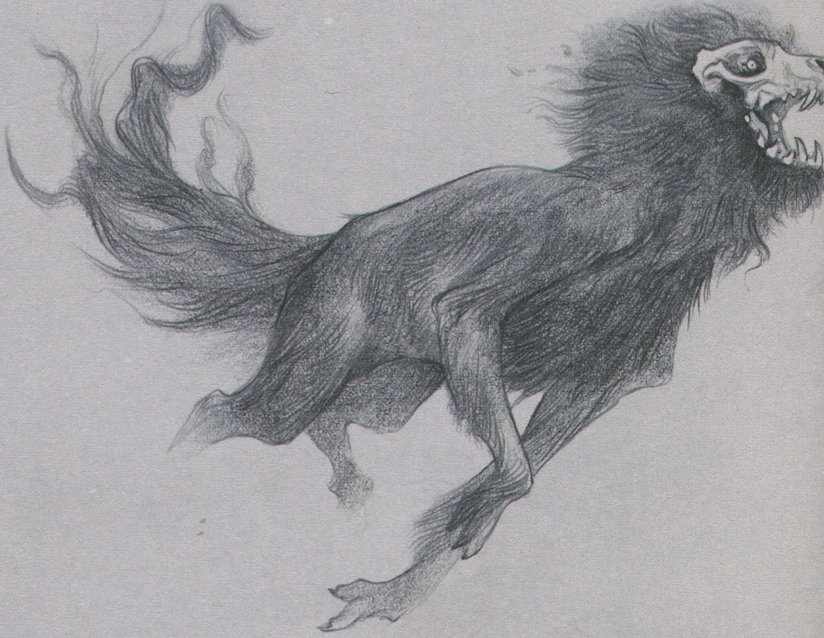
While unfinished, the third sketch shown below provides a view of the creature's full portrait from the front as it begins to move towards the viewer. The quickly applied lines capture the gesture and wiriness of the fur, which gives the impression of motion. You can see that the fleshy nose has been removed in favor of an open nasal cavity and exposed cheekbones, allowing the creature to read unmistakably as an unearthly, terrifying dog.

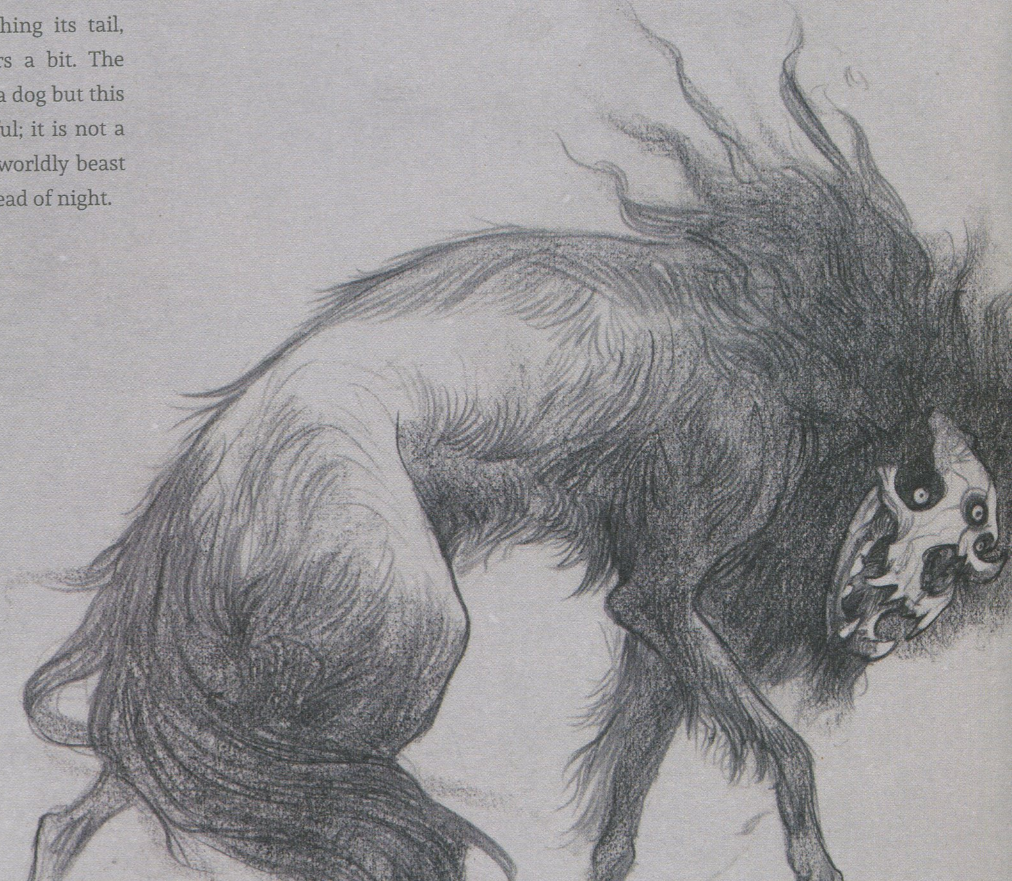


Poses

In attempting to find a suitable pose for the final design, I again referred to the energy and gesture of the thumbnails. The first pose on the right captures the motion of the barghest in mid-stride, with head and tail up, back arched, long tail billowing, and bright eyes. Unfortunately, it reads more as a playful dog than a mysterious, aloof, spectral creature, but it does go a way towards conveying the features of the face. I do like the ethereal look of the flowing hair.

The second pose has a better gesture and view of the overall body shape, but essentially sends the energy of the creature in the opposite direction to the pose above. The back and shoulders are hunched, the head lowered, lending a bit of that hyena-like skulking posture that I explored in the thumbnails. The creature is in mid-step, lashing its tail, which obscures the hindquarters a bit. The overall effect is, yet again, one of a dog but this time one that is anxious or fearful; it is not a haunting impression of an otherworldly beast lurking at the crossroads in the dead of night.





• SUBSPECIES •

Coastal barghest

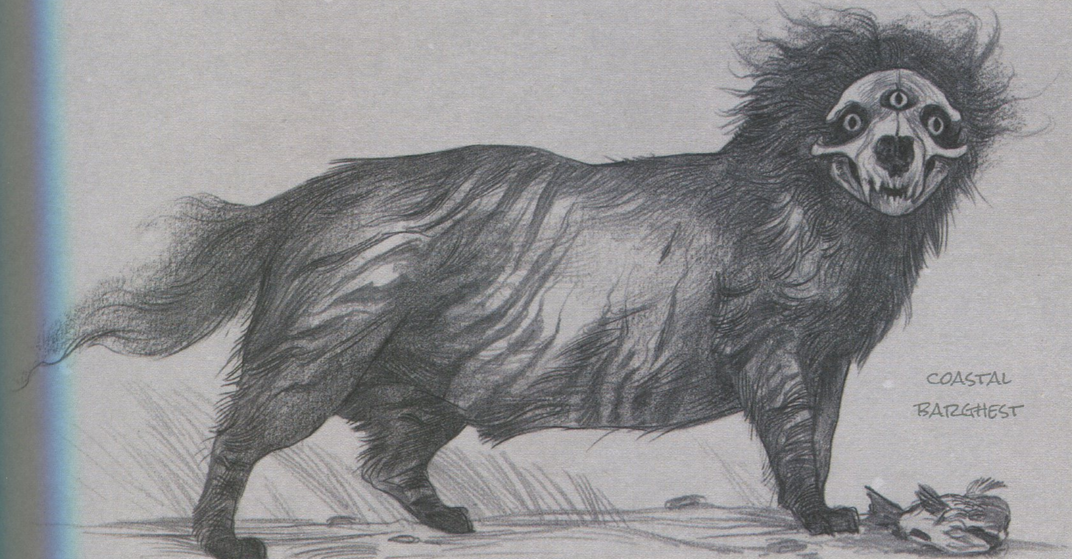
While the most well-known subspecies of barghest inhabits the highlands and rural areas of the British Isles, there are a few lesser known creatures that appear to be related. The coastal barghest is roughly about half the size of its better-known cousin. It appears to be an efficient scavenger and possesses an impressive set of thick jaws powered by thick neck muscles. They often feed on stranded whales and leviathans, their powerful bites easily piercing the thick blubber and sometimes even cracking bone for the marrow. While coastal barghests will gather together in large numbers at a washed-up carcass, they seem to prefer to move around in small family groups when they are not feeding.

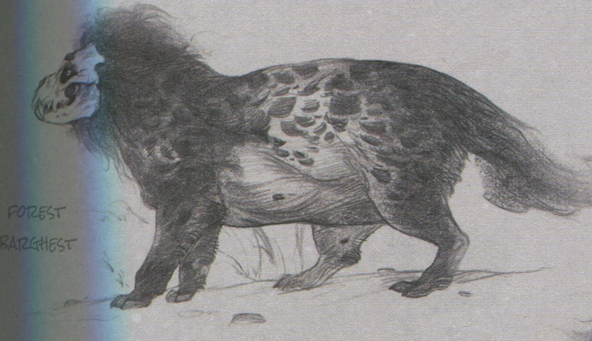
Forest barghest

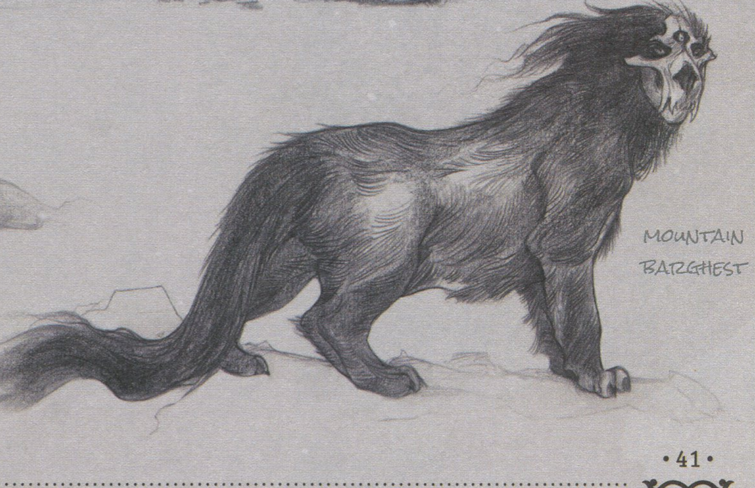
Inhabiting the forested lowlands of England and France, the forest barghest has adapted to move quickly between the thick undergrowth of forested areas. It is smaller in stature and has features which are less pronounced than any other varieties. They have camouflaged coats that allow them to move concealed among dappled forest lighting as they hunt for small mammals. Despite the short legs this barghest is constantly on the move in its search for food, using its enlarged olfactory system (sense of smell) to hunt among the forest detritus. Their enhanced sense of smell also enables them to communicate over long distances between individuals because, like the highland species, they are extremely territorial.

Mountain barghest

The mountain barghest is only known from a partial skull and a handful of sightings. It resides in the highest regions of the Alps and most evidence comes from the remains of local livestock. It is shorter than the British variety but sports a significantly heavier body, with a flatter face and narrower eyes – both of which are needed for enduring high winds. Their feet are enlarged and examination of possible tracks suggests that each paw is covered with coarse keratin denticles (tooth-like structures) or scales, which likely enhances the barghest's grip on slippery surfaces. The most dramatic difference is the mountain barghest's long tail, which helps the creature balance when running along cliffs.

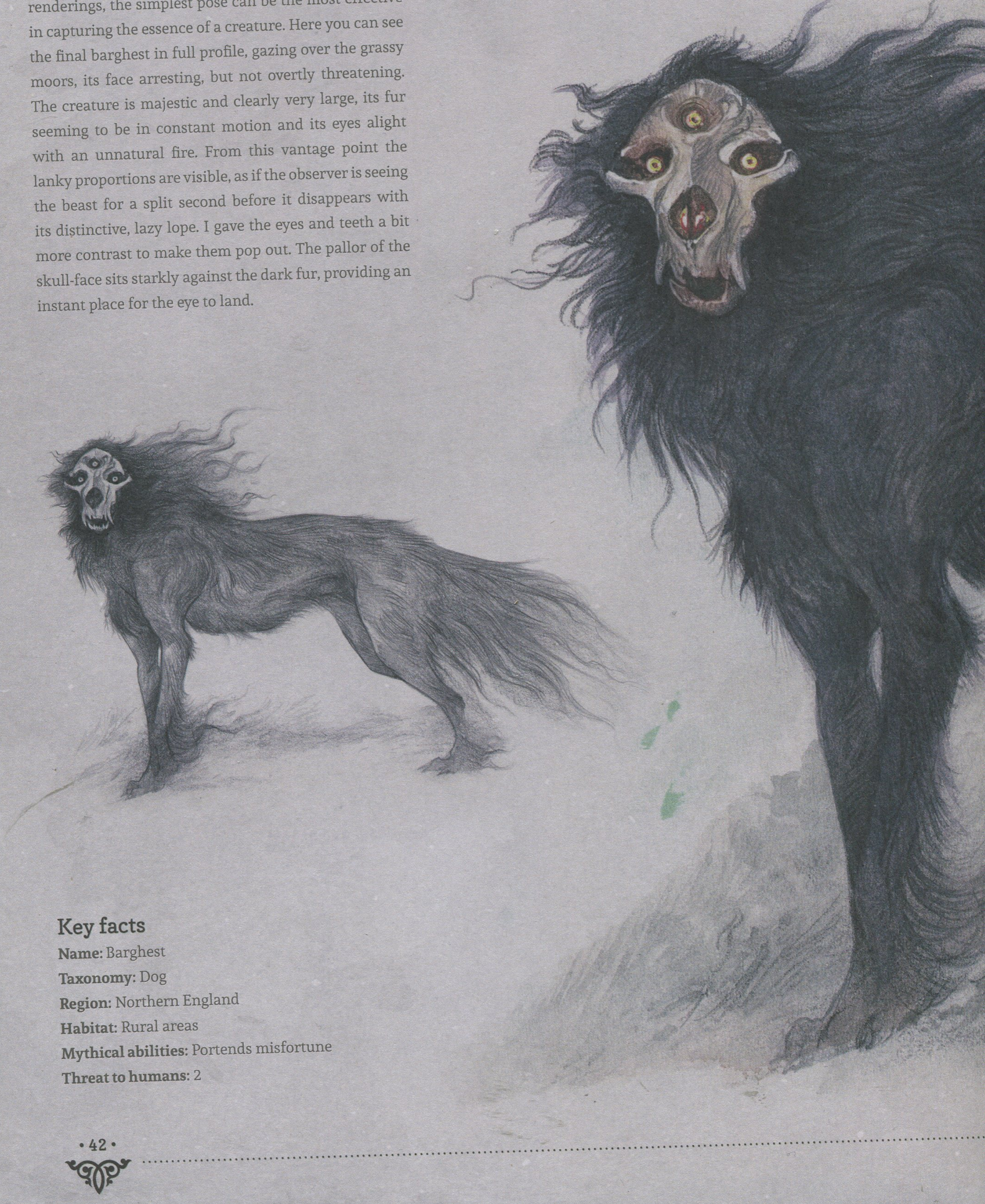






• FINAL DESIGN •

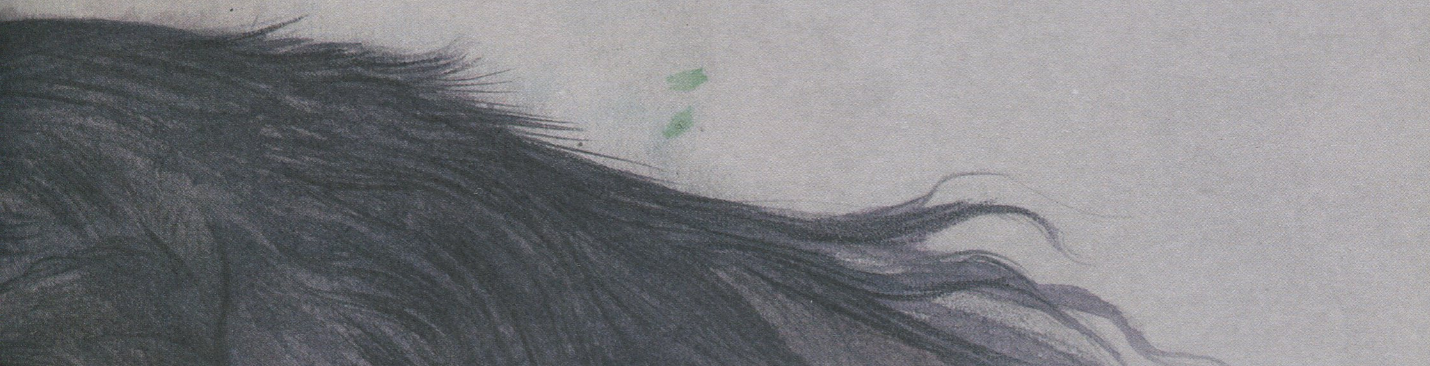
Sometimes, when it comes to natural-history-style renderings, the simplest pose can be the most effective in capturing the essence of a creature. Here you can see the final barghest in full profile, gazing over the grassy moors, its face arresting, but not overtly threatening. The creature is majestic and clearly very large, its fur seeming to be in constant motion and its eyes alight with an unnatural fire. From this vantage point the lanky proportions are visible, as if the observer is seeing the beast for a split second before it disappears with its distinctive, lazy lope. I gave the eyes and teeth a bit more contrast to make them pop out. The pallor of the skull-face sits starkly against the dark fur, providing an instant place for the eye to land.

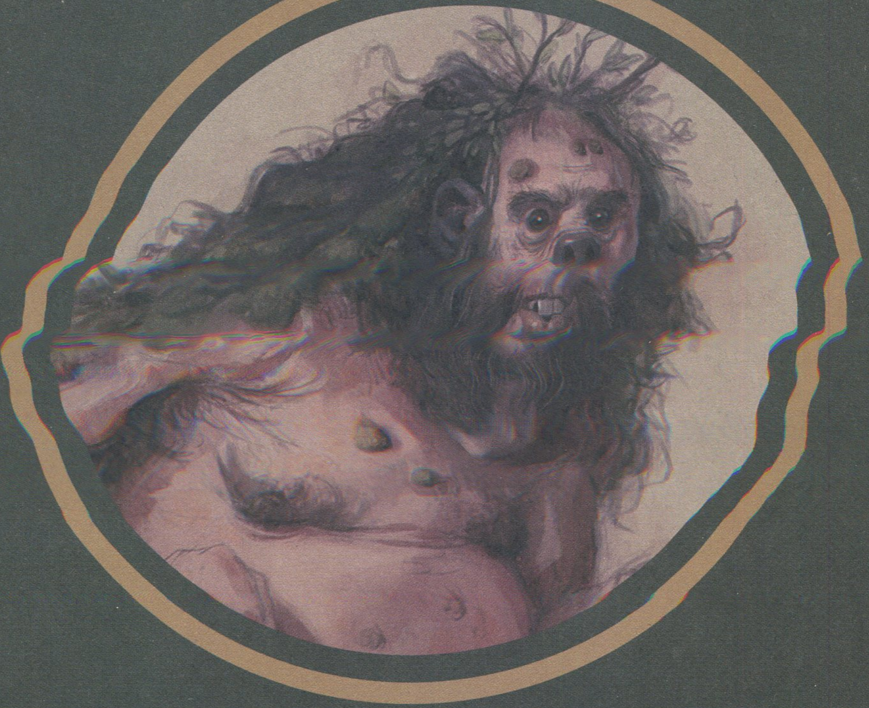


Key facts

Name: Barghest
Taxonomy: Dog
Region: Northern England
Habitat: Rural areas
Mythical abilities: Portends misfortune
Threat to humans: 2

Final image © Tiffany Turrill





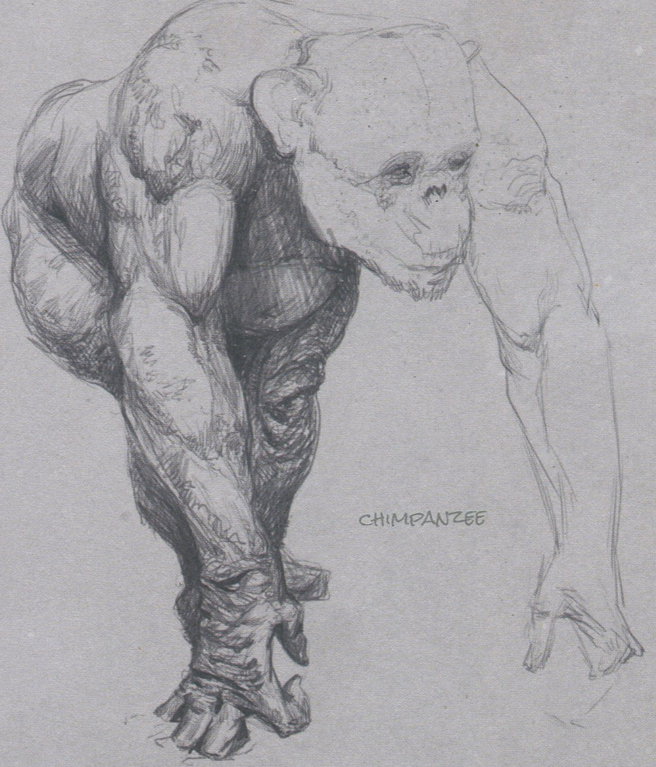
• BOGGART •

The boggart is a terrestrial creature described as human-like in form, though very uncivilized, unsightly, and often possessing bestial qualities. It is usually sighted in counties of northern England, where people describe it as resembling a hunched old man, but strong as a calf, with matted hair and beard, long arms like fishing poles, big feet and hands, and hideous black eyes. Boggarts trail a long chain behind themselves, which makes a horrible noise to scare away people and other creatures. They are easily frightened but, if provoked, can be aggressive as well: spitting, growling, throwing rocks, and even biting. Locals are afraid to enter the marshlands because of them – there have been many cases of people getting lost there and never coming back. Rumors abound that a boggart caught the unfortunates and devoured them! They live in marshlands, in small caves or holes dug in the ground, usually hidden from plain sight. They also live in polar parts of the world, where temperatures are low and food is scarce. In addition, there are rumors of boggarts living near villages or cities. Some people swear that they have seen boggarts dressed like beggars in the night, scavenging for food, taking shelter under bridges or in abandoned barns. Maybe these are just stories to frighten little children. Who knows?

• COSMIN PODAR •

Concept artist & illustrator • behance.net/podarcosmin

• FIELD NOTES •

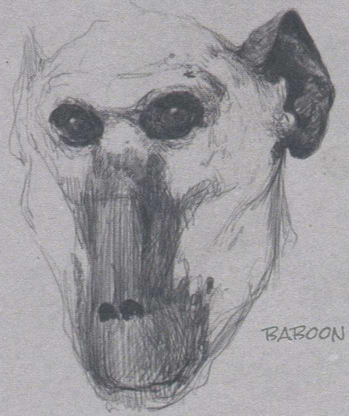


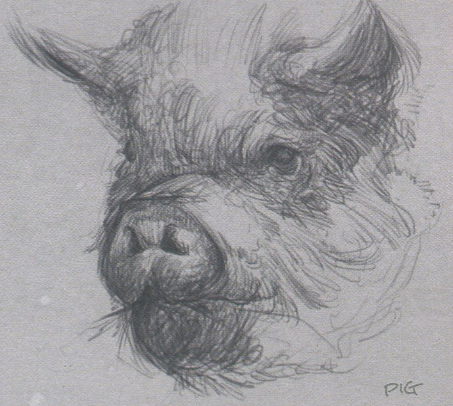
Chimpanzees

The chimpanzee has a hunched body and very much resembles an old man, even down to the wrinkled skin on its face. We rarely associate chimpanzees with being harmful or dangerous, but if provoked, they can be a nasty surprise. I think this all fits the character of the boggart, even in attitude and behavior, but chimpanzees are a little smarter.

Baboons

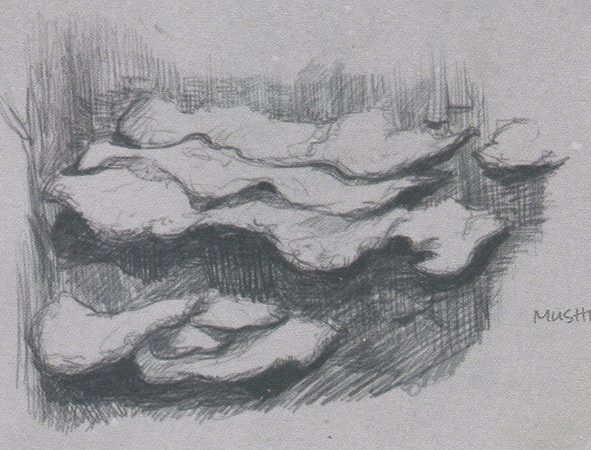
I find that a hairless baboon is very scary looking, though it is not that dangerous. The dark eyes and eye sockets are frightening, making the baboon's head look bigger and more aggressive. The black ears create contrast with the pale skin. Their behavior is similar to a chimpanzee's and they also match the boggart's description in terms of posture and having long arms.





Pigs

Pigs are often associated with characteristics which we use to offend others, such as being dirty, fat, or ugly, but they are gentle animals that spend all day rooting and grubbing in the mud. This behavior is very fitting for the boggart, because life in the swamps is difficult. Food is not easy to find, so possessing a good sense of smell like a pig is a great asset. The mud mixed with a pig's sparse body hair also helps to protect it against mosquitoes and other pests, which is another attribute I can mimic in the boggart design.



Tree mushrooms

A boggart would likely have small plants, algae, and mushrooms growing on it, as a result of sitting in a swamp all day. Here I study some shelf fungi – a type of mushroom that grows on tree trunks – similar to what might grow on the tough skin of a boggart.

Muscular arms

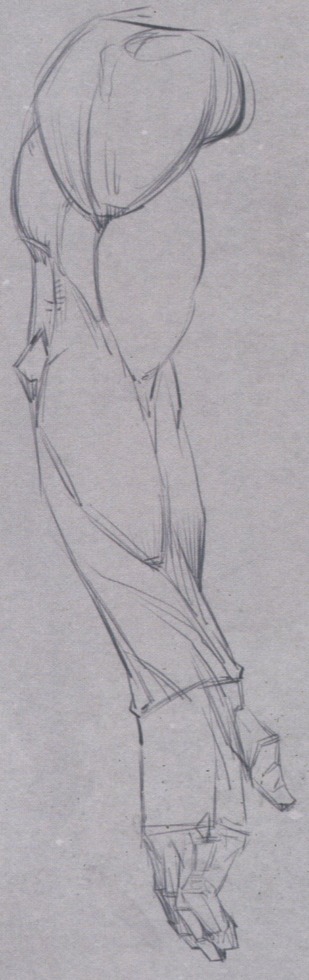
It is very important to understand human arm anatomy in order to exaggerate its parts. We as humans are accustomed to seeing others of our species, so it is very easy for us to spot mistakes in exaggeration. There may seem to be hidden rules for exaggerating anatomy, but it really just comes down to understanding proportions. If you learn proportions well and practice them in your mind until they come naturally, you will avoid huge mistakes.

In the initial stage I try to define the most important muscles and features using basic shapes: the deltoid, biceps, triceps, elbow, forearm muscles, and hand.

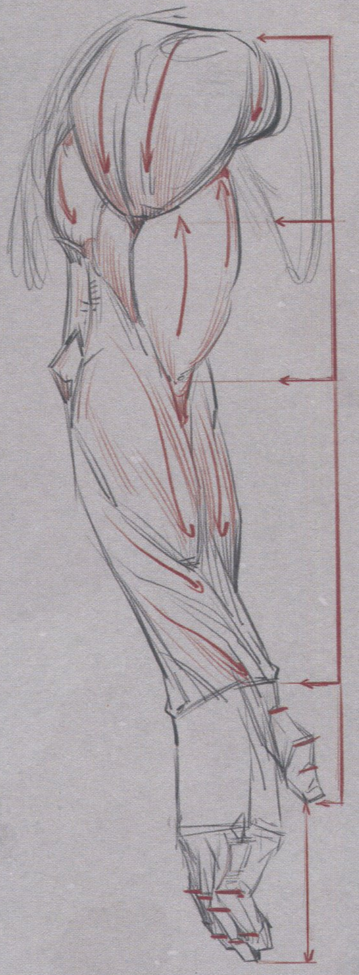
After placing the forms and giving them the correct proportions, I start to loosely refine the shapes. When you want to render the human body it can be useful to render the surface of the skin according to the striation of the muscle beneath. This exercise helped me a lot in my early years of learning the human body. The muscles have a flow, and if you learn their striations you will understand how important they are for rendering.

When the basics are complete, proportions are correct, and I have added some basic rendering as a guide to make sure the volumes are correct, the easy part comes, and for some the fun part as well. Here is where I can be expressive with lines. This step involves adding details, going from lightest to darkest. The darkest parts in my drawings are the parts where the light does not hit, or where a mass is touching another mass and creating a shadow.

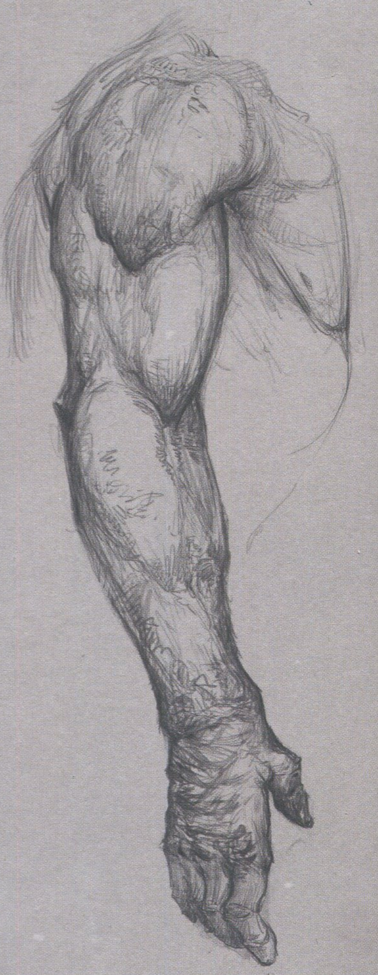
BASIC PROPORTIONS



REFINING MUSCLE STRIATIONS



BUILDING UP SHADING



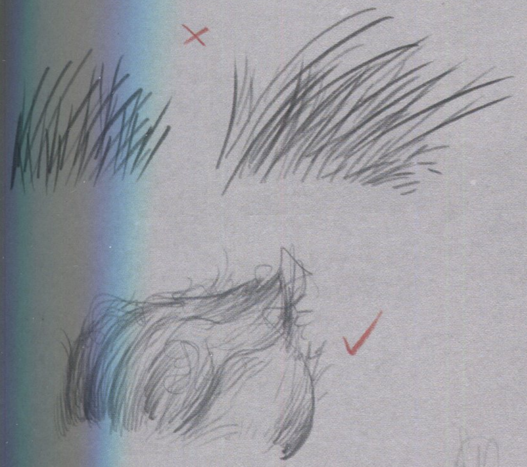
Hair

A common mistake made by amateur artists is drawing individual hairs to make clumps of hair. Try to think of a person's hair as a helmet as it is better to consider hair as one object than thousands of pointy objects. I think of hair as a whole because lighting affects objects in that way, and if you look closely, you will see that people's hair is lit accordingly, with a core shadow, midtones, light tones, reflected light, and highlights.

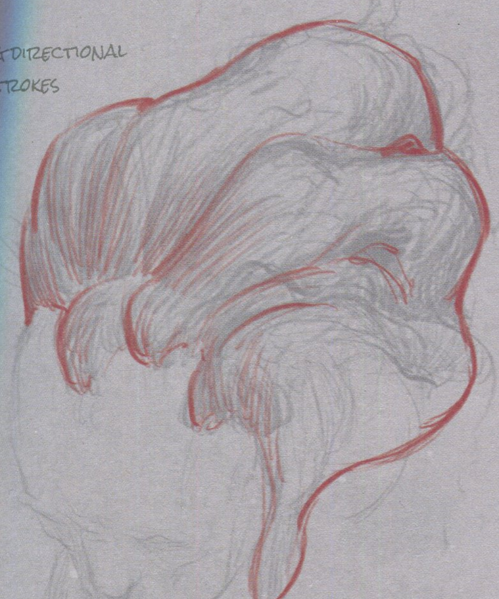
After you imagine the hair as a whole object, you will see that it is composed of other smaller parts. In order to keep everything simple and avoid drawing individual hairs, I apply the same rules of shading that I used in the arm muscle section on the previous page, following the curves that the hair makes as it grows out of the head. I align my strokes with the shape and direction of the hair to create a dynamic and believable result.

If the hair is matted, as it will be on the boggart design, or fluffier or more chaotic, I usually add a few hairs that protrude from the main shape. I avoid overdoing this however, because I don't want to ruin the initial form of the hair; I add just enough so that it appears more realistic. If the subject was wearing hair gel or had perfect hair, then you might not do this step, but it is a small final touch that gives more detail and a natural feel.

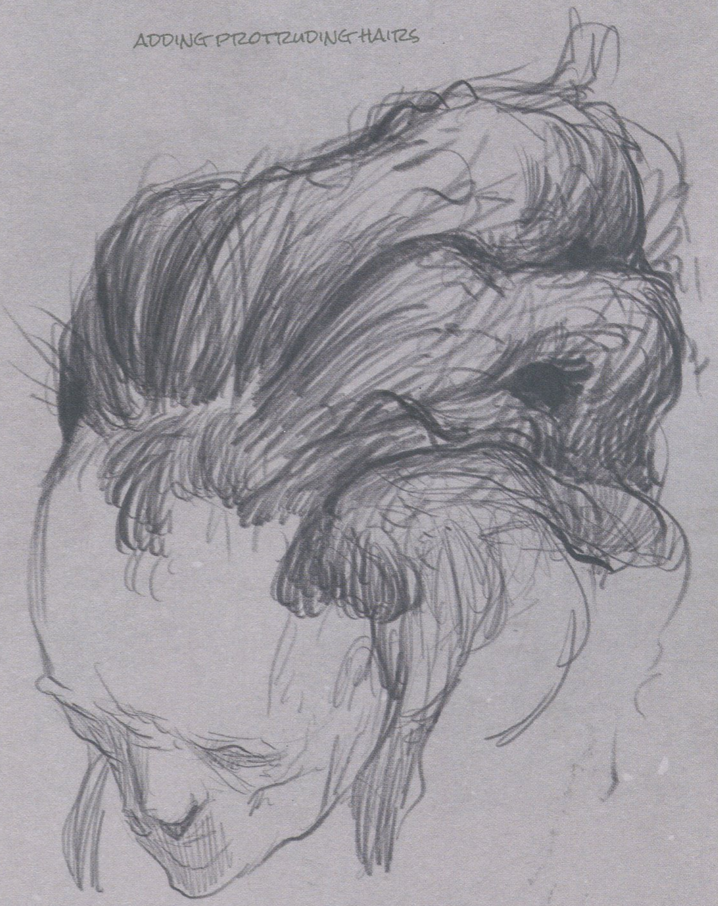
DRAWING HAIR AS A WHOLE



APPLYING DIRECTIONAL STROKES



ADDING PROTRUDING HAIRS



• DESIGN PROCESS •

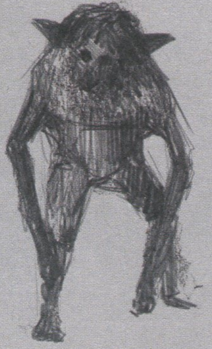
Thumbnails

I created many sketches to explore this creature, trying to maintain the same key features in all of them: the matted hair and the long arms. Even though I have a description for it, I wanted to explore the boggart's design as best I could, trying to make it fatter, shorter, thinner, more human, or more beastly, in order to see what worked best.

Out of these twelve sketches, I like thumbnail 08 the most. I also like the hints of vegetation on the creature's back and shoulder in numbers 07 and 09, the pose of thumbnail 11, and the fact that number 12 has a snout. I think that the snout is an element that could make the boggart more unique when mixed with the primate features.

I notice that I have made many predatory poses and aggressive stances, even though in the description the boggart is aggressive only in rare situations, when it is provoked. I need to keep this in mind as I move forward.

01



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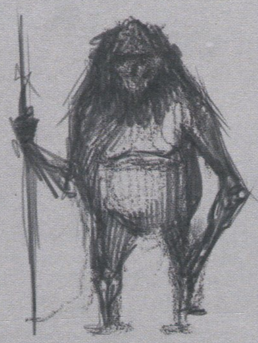

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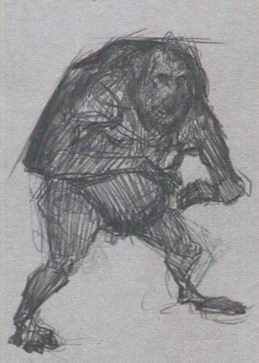

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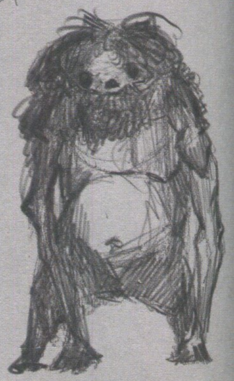

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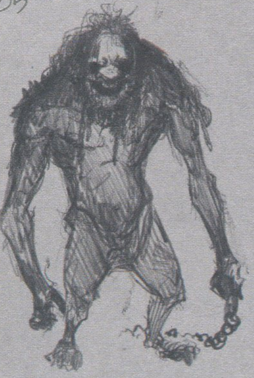

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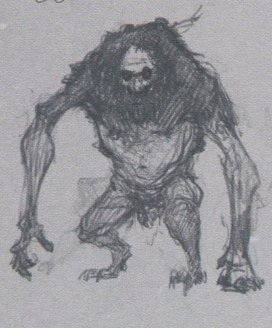

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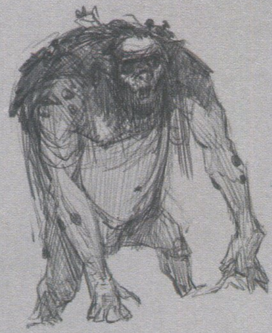

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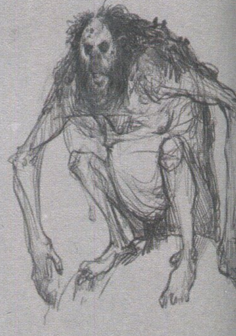

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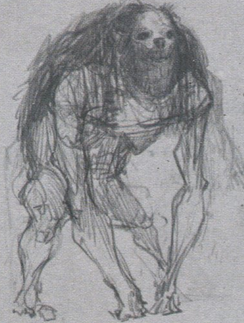

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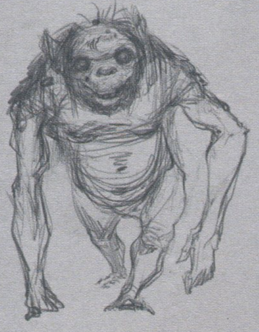

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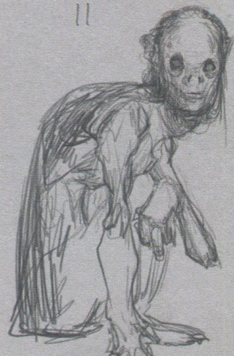
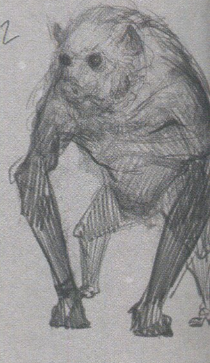


12

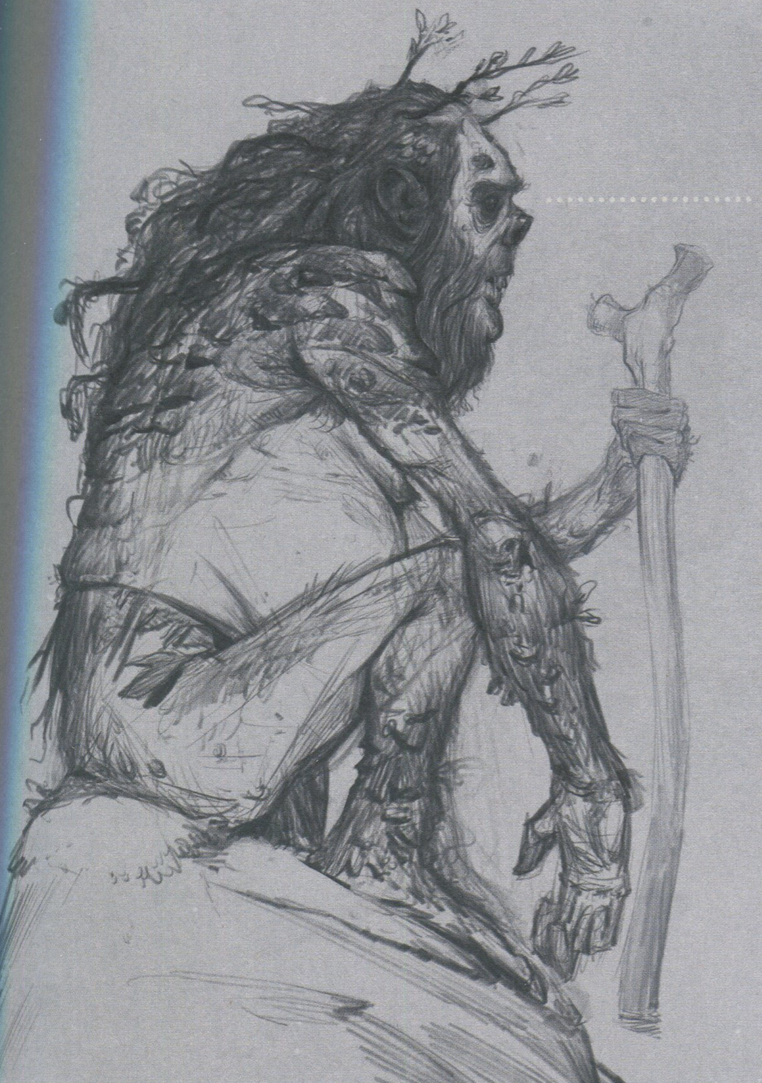


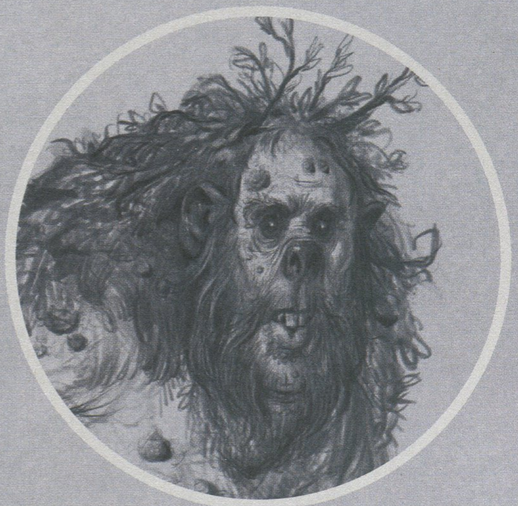
Further exploration

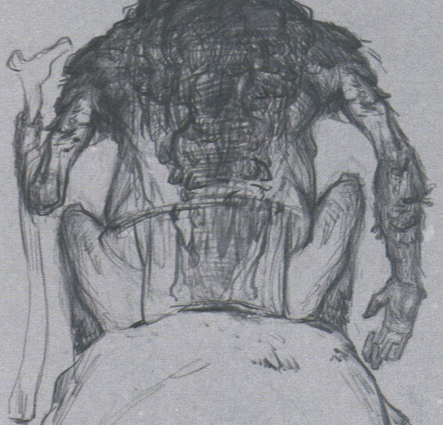
I chose to develop thumbnail 08 because I liked the thin arms and unfit-looking torso. From the side view the hunched shape of the boggart is most clear. He does not hunt, so is not built like a predator; he is omnivorous but meat is only on the menu when he finds dead animals, which is rare. The hunched pose also gives the viewer the feeling that the boggart is constantly afraid and alert, which is a significant part of its personality that I want to convey.

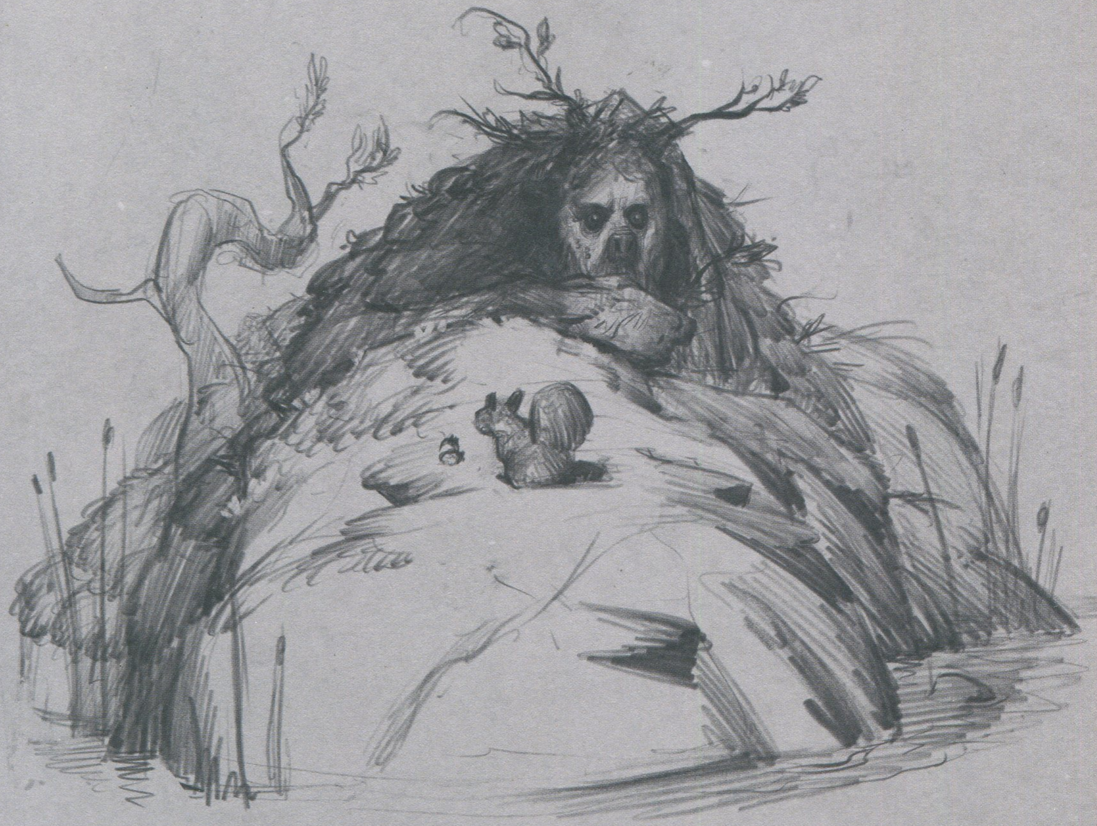
The face shines; it is the most important feature. The boggart's head has the most contrast because of its pale skin against the beard, eyes, nose, and ears. Placing branches on its head as decoration strengthened the silhouette by adding personality and camouflage. Providing it with a stick also gave it a hint of human intelligence and sensitivity, and lends to the idea of the boggart appearing like a hunched old man, as reported in folklore.

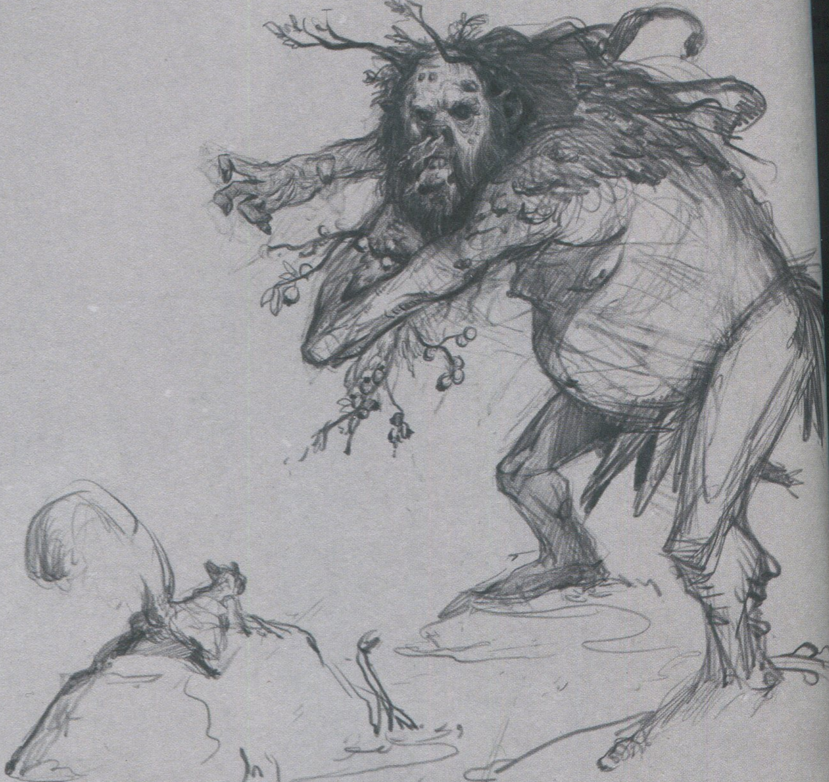
The back view of the boggart offers the most impact in terms of its disguise. Almost all of its back is covered by hair, mushrooms, and other small vegetation grown during its life in the swamp. As a defense when it sees people or animals, the boggart runs into bushes or hides near rocks and turns its back to passersby, making itself invisible. When danger goes away, it returns to its normal activities, foraging and being lazy.









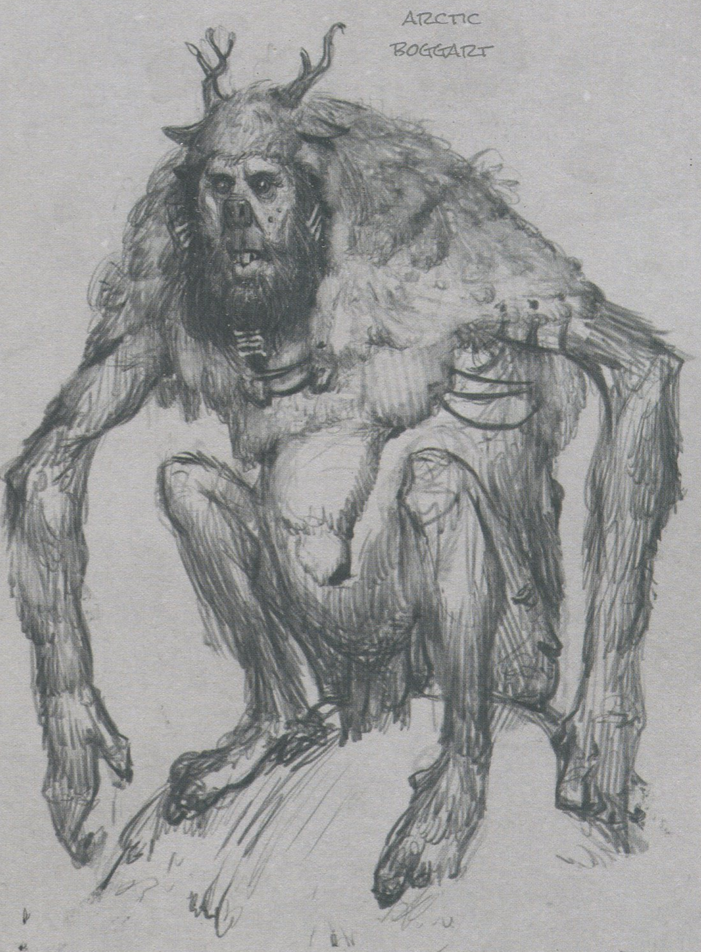


Poses

The pose above is one of the poses you would find the boggart in if you went into the swamps to search for it. Being constantly afraid is part of its nature, and hiding is part of its daily routine. The strength of this pose is how well the boggart is camouflaged: the dark facial hair and dark nose help it to blend with the environment, watching the viewer with its black eyes.

Getting into a fight with another creature is rare, but when that creature is small it is a different story. In the pose on the right you can see that suddenly the boggart becomes brave, jumping around to frighten the critter, splashing the water with its hands, growling, and spitting mucus. The boggart usually exhibits this behavior when it is trying to get food or scare away a creature who has disturbed it from its daily laziness.

• SUBSPECIES •

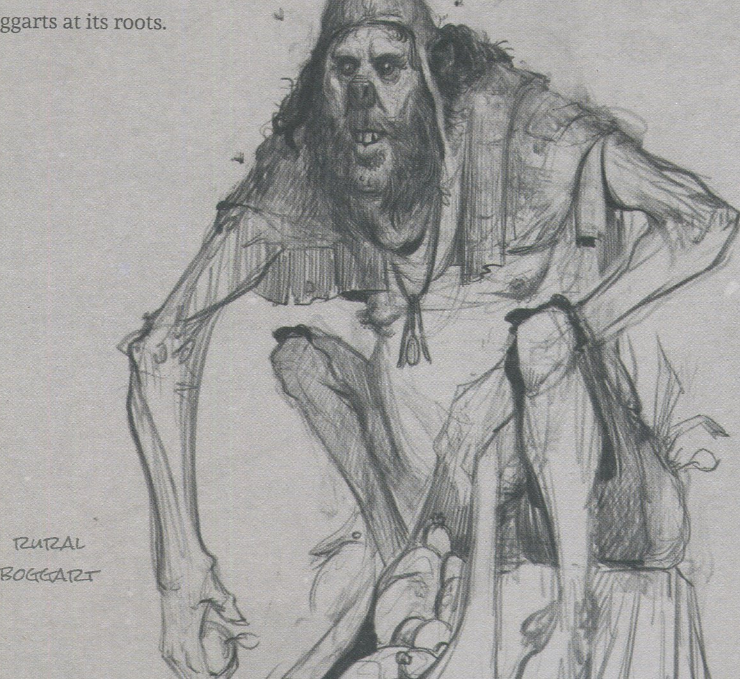


Arctic boggart

The biggest adaptation of the Arctic boggart is a stronger resistance to cold. It also makes fur clothing out of dead animals. It is too afraid to kill, so it scavenges. Its stomach has adapted to this very well, making stronger acid to dissolve rotten meat and bone, and its immune system is stronger compared to its relatives. The Arctic boggart uses small bones and sticks to decorate its beard or hair sometimes – it makes the beast more relatable, almost human.

Rural boggart

This type of boggart is very different from and rarer than other subspecies. It is not hugely different in appearance, still human-like without much body hair, but in terms of behavior it is very particular. Living near human villages has encouraged it to disguise itself and steal. It takes clothes from people and can act like a human beggar, mostly to get food. It can't speak very well, so buying food with money is not its way; its shyness and fear of others have not disappeared along with its hair – it is the same as other boggarts at its roots.

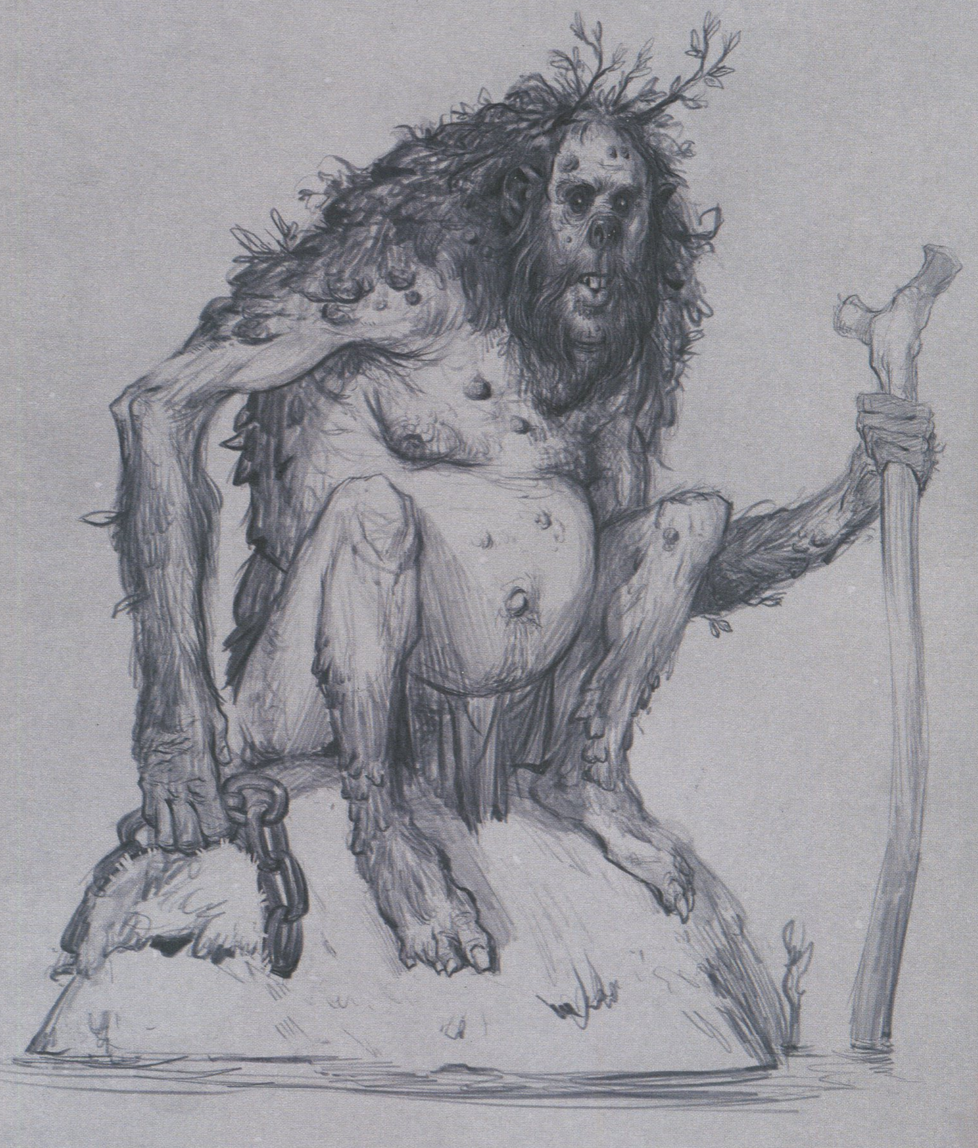


• FINAL DESIGN •

Here we are at the end of our short journey with this boggart. At the beginning of its creation, I was uncertain of the feel that the rough sketches had: they were a bit unsettling and scary, giving the boggart a predatory feel that was not quite fitting. As I progressed and refined my ideas, it became gentler and harmless. Of course its appearance does not help it, but what do you expect?

Living in the marshes or the cruel cold does not make one beautiful. Because of its humid swamp habitat and hard wrinkly skin, the boggart has some vegetation growing on it. Sitting in marsh water all day is very likely to create skin problems of some kind. In the depths of the ocean, there are whales that have barnacles attached to them, which don't harm them but are often seen on their bodies in large patches. Similarly, the boggart usu growths on its shoulders, back, feet, ha forearms, and uses them as camouflag

What I personally like very much is t When the boggart is peaceful, it looks and harmless, even with those black e when frustration and anger get to it, become frightening, no longer calm and



Key facts

Name: Boggart

Taxonomy: Ape, human

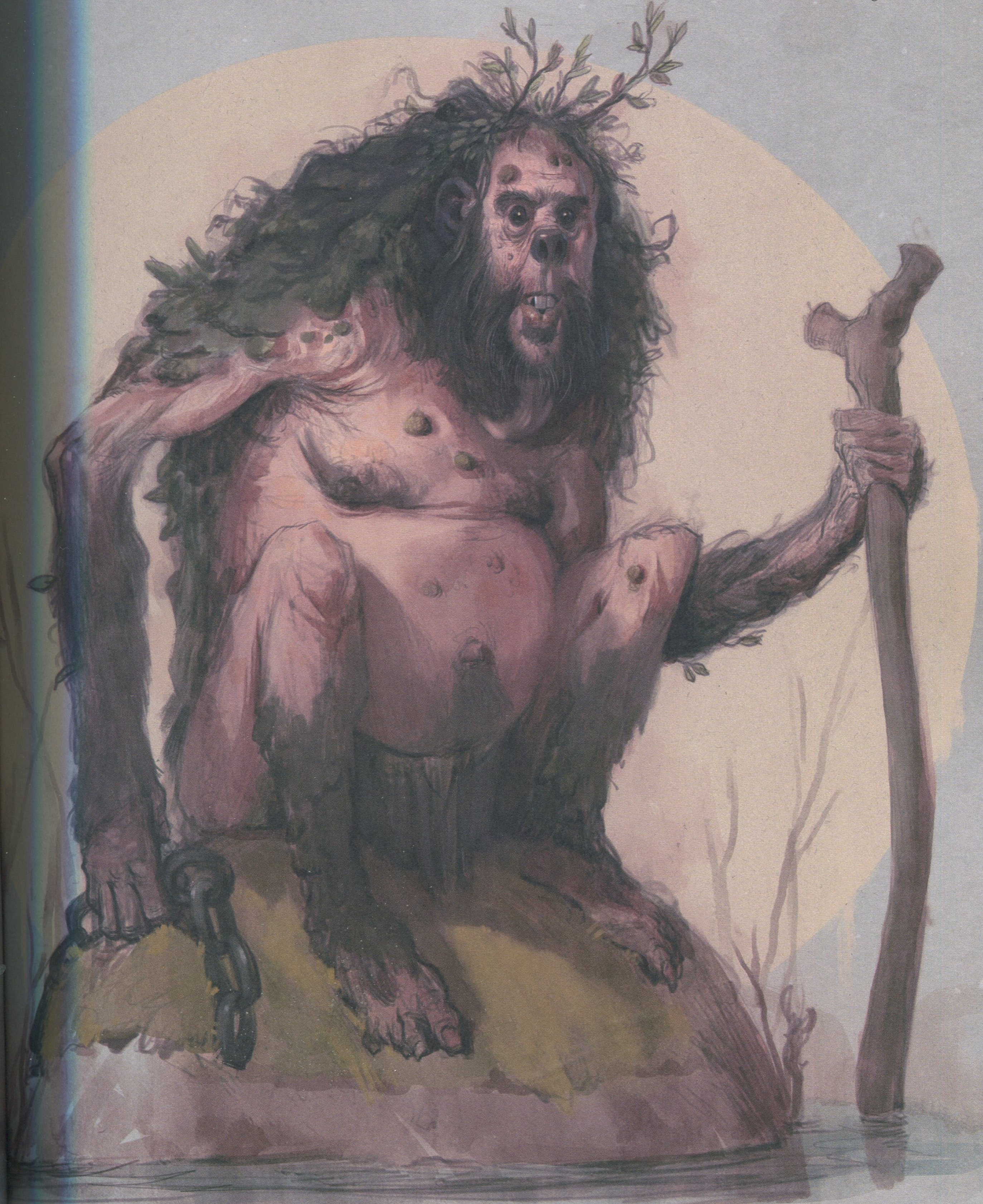
Region: Northern England

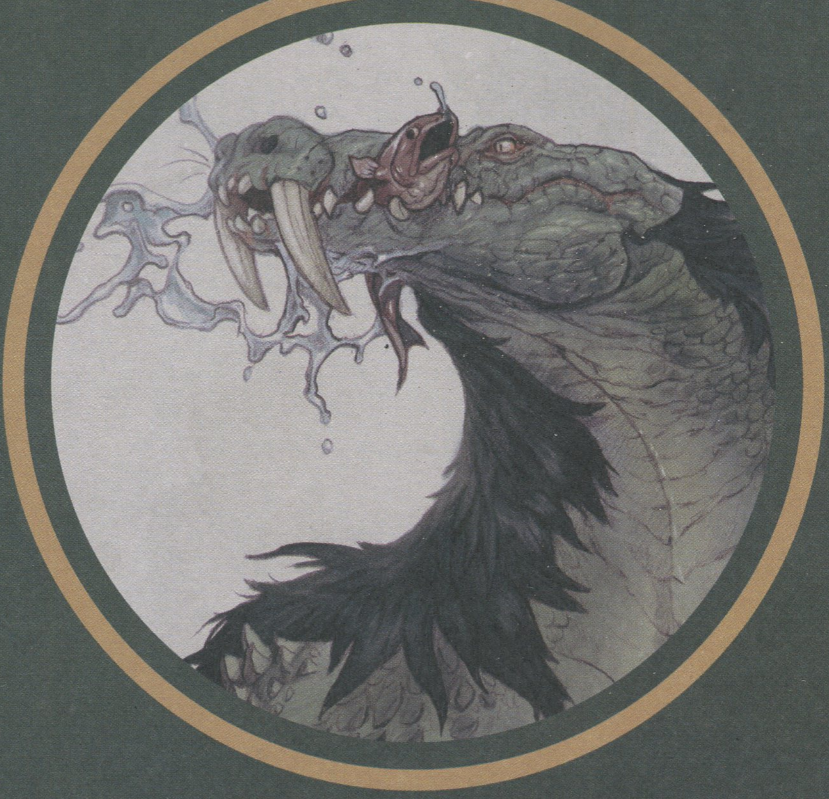
Habitat: Marshland

Mythical abilities: Mischief

Threat to humans: 2

Final image © Cosmin Podar





• BUNYIP •

The bunyip is a large, lurking creature found in dark swamps all around the continent of Australia. The aboriginal word *bunyip* loosely translat to "evil spirit," which perfectly describes the mystery and terror the bunyip has inflicted upon the native population. Its face is said to be part do part crocodile, sometimes with horns or the large tusks of a walrus. Typically, the beast has dark, slick fur, and flippers on all of its limbs for eas of traveling through murky water. The bunyip is said to have a taste for human flesh, non-discriminatory to age or gender. Due to the terrifyi nature of this creature, most eyewitness accounts say it appears to be amalgamated from different shapes and animals, making it truly one of th most unnerving of Australia's beasts. Its ability to stay hidden until it is too late keeps most Australians far away from the swamps, whether da or night.

• DAMIEN MAMMOLITI •

Concept artist • boneandbrush.com

• FIELD NOTES •

Crocodiles

Studying the different facets of the bunyip, it is clearly a beast that needs careful consideration. The creature is meant to contain multiple animals upon its face, the crocodile being one of the more fierce of those animals. My strategy when approaching the bunyip is to become familiar with the features of these animals so that I can play around with the idea of how to blend them together in a creative and believable fashion. The crocodile will provide me with intense and ferocious attributes.

Dogs

Along with the crocodile, the bunyip is meant to have the snout of a dog. A dog is a familiar and even a cute animal for most of us, so finding the best way to blend this with the crocodile is on my mind as I study the features. One element that stands out is the whiskers – something that when put upon the crocodile's face may provide it with a strange and monstrous appearance.

Walruses

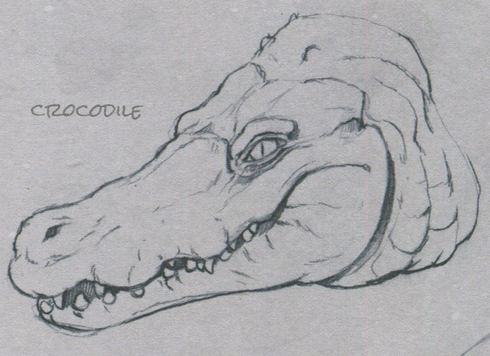
The third animal to be blended into the bunyip's face is the walrus. It is said to have either horns or tusks that resemble those of a walrus, so my aim is to draw the entire snout of the animal to familiarize myself with the curvature and length of the tusks. Positioning these as "fangs" on an already large-toothed crocodile snout will add a ferocious look to the bunyip.

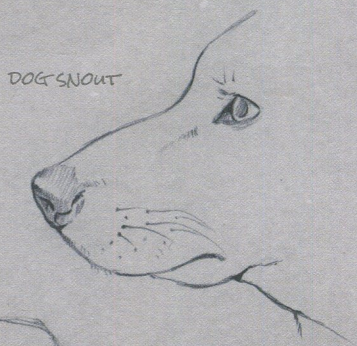
Flippers

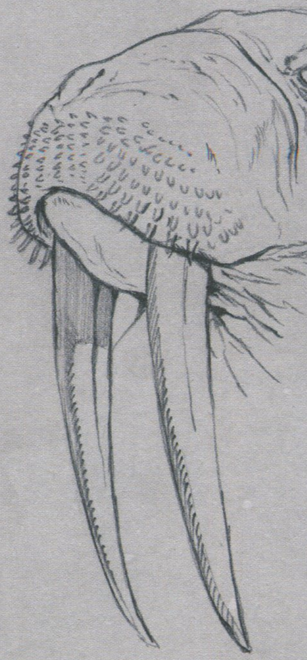
I also need to familiarize myself with the bunyip's arms and hands, which will eventually turn into flippers. There are two types of aquatic forelimbs that come to mind for these: those of seals or walruses and those of frogs. First I study the claws on a seal's flipper. They are longer than I initially imagined, and I am happy with the thought of being able to add claws to the bunyip to enhance its monstrous appeal.

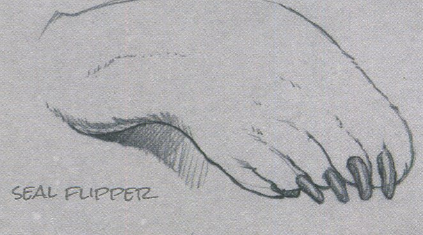
Webbing

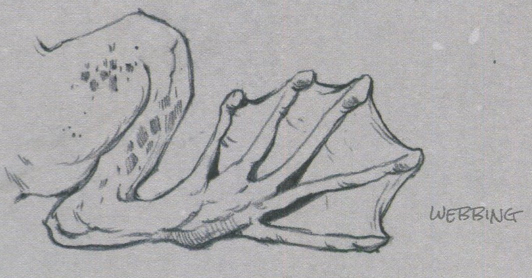
Another type of flipper is the very obviously webbed foot of the frog. I look for ways to include this with the bunyip, as crocodiles have webbed toes much like frogs. Mixing this with the seal's flipper will provide a believable blend for the bunyip. I consider adding claws to the frog's feet, wondering how I will implement them without making it look too unbelievable. Using the shape of the seal's flipper with the elasticity of the frog's webbing could be the right direction.











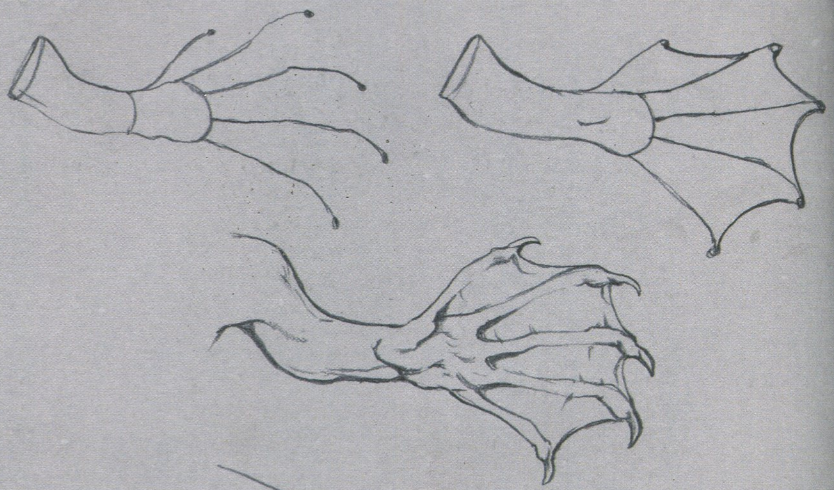
Webbed claws

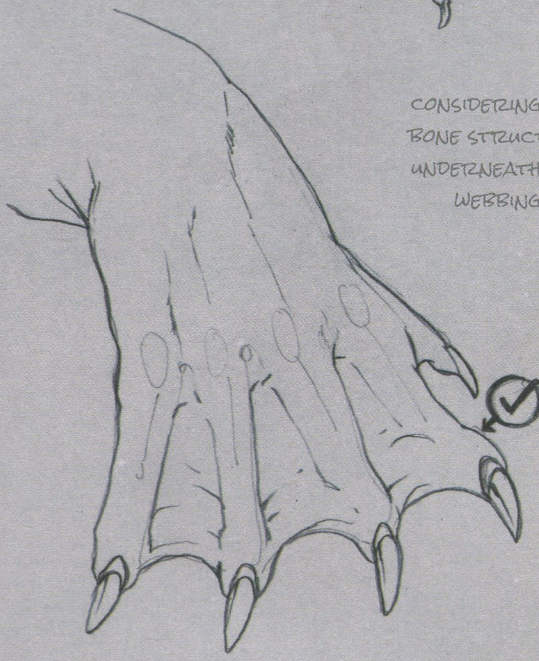
When drawing the webbing, it is easiest to begin with the skeleton of the hand. Finding the correct length for the fingers is key. From there, I fill in the gaps between the fingertips and try to find a good bowing between them. It is a good idea to keep in mind which side of the hand you are drawing; in this case, I am working on drawing the palm of the hand. From there, I can add in the claws to a reasonable length, and see how the arm will work up to the shoulder.

Working on the top of the hand, it becomes clearer how the claws and webbing work together. It helps to have an idea of where the fingers are beneath the web; I have marked the area where the main knuckles would be placed on the hand, where the skin is not attached. This is a good way to draw the webbing – working with a hand first, and imagining the bones beneath the webbing to make the hand appear natural. The flipper is starting to work as a blend between seal and frog, which is something I hoped to find in these sketches.

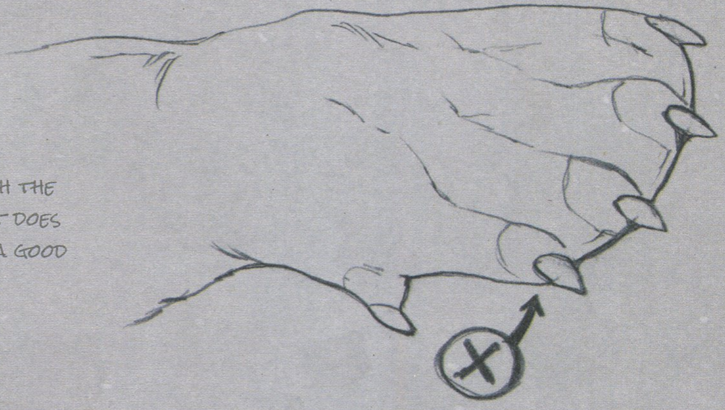
The wrong way to approach flippers would be to work from web to hand. In the example at the bottom here I tried to find the arch of the webbing first, and bring in the fingers and claws after. Clearly it does not work as well because the hand has become lost. The bowing of the webbing is not nearly as natural as my previous attempt, and the fingers do not appear to be an appropriate length. This was also an attempt to make the hand appear more seal-like and less frog-like, but I find it to be too friendly and less monstrous, which will not work for the bunyip.

BUILDING UP THE PALM OF THE HAND





CONSIDERING THE BONE STRUCTURE UNDERNEATH THE WEBBING



STARTING WITH THE WEBBING FIRST DOES NOT PRODUCE A GOOD RESULT

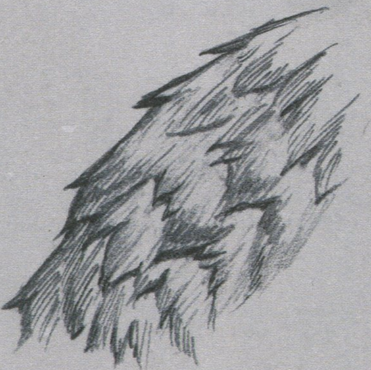
Slick fur

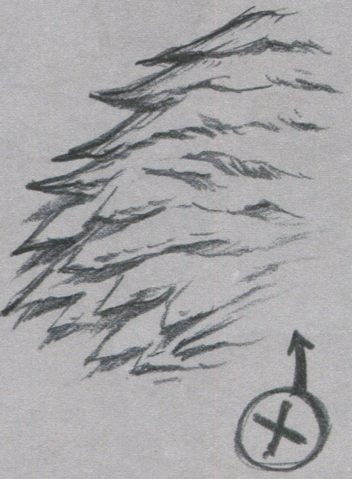
When fur becomes wet, it is harder to find ways to draw it without making the clumps appear too uniform. The bunyip is meant to have sleek, more water-resistant fur. I decide to study otter fur to find ways in which water-resistant fur tends to clump together. In the example on the right, I work to find a good balance between sleekness and clumping. When the fur is too uniform, it doesn't appear sleek. When it is flattened, the effect looks much more natural. However, I feel shorter hair will not work as well for the bunyip as more fluid, wavy hair.

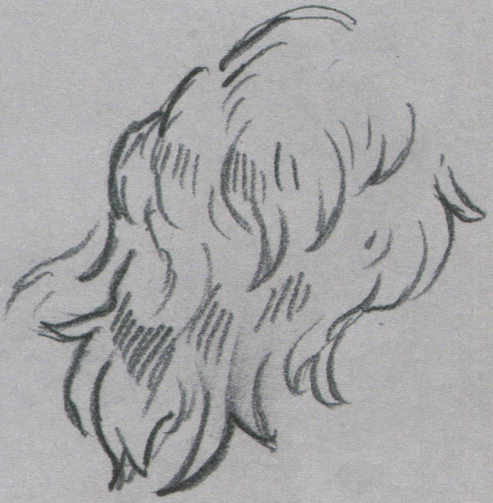
I therefore try out a longer-haired variety for the bunyip, starting by blocking in the waves of hair in layers. From top to bottom, I render the waves (still in layers), looking to find a good silhouette. If the fur hangs off the body, it may be that the silhouette of the wet fur gives the body a unique look, so I attempt to find interesting variations of fur at the tips. I also block in the areas where the darkest parts of the fur will show once I render it.

I then take a similar drawing to my initial study, and try to render it out a bit more to find the volume of the fur. It is important to find the highlights here, as the fur is meant to be very dark, yet shiny, due to the wet nature of the swamp creature. In the final drawing here, my aim is to find those volume highlights and darker core shadows (the band where light and shadow meet) to emphasize the shine of the fur. I still keep the silhouette in mind as I reach the tips of the hair near the ends.

RESEARCHING WATER-RESISTANT FUR

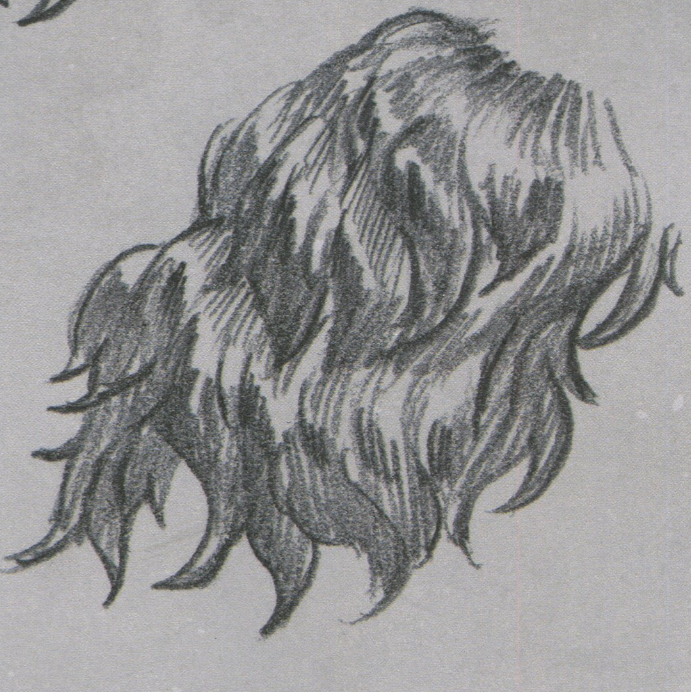






SKETCHING WAVY HAIR IN LAYERS

USING HIGHLIGHTS AND CORE SHADOWS TO EMPHASIZE SHINE

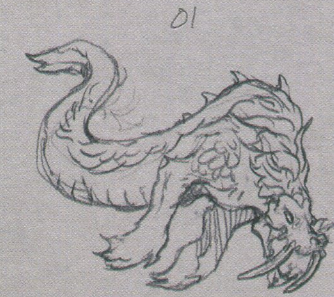


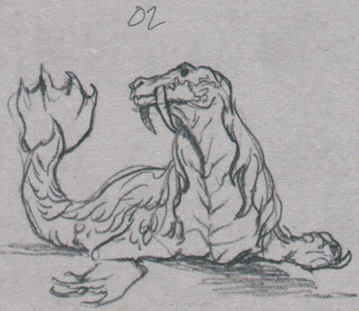
• DESIGN PROCESS •

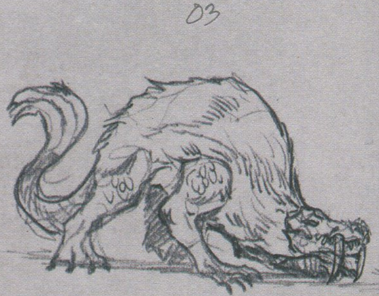
Thumbnails

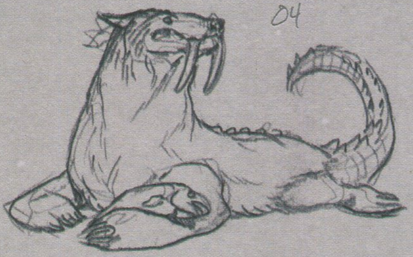
My aim with the thumbnails of the bunyip was to play around with all sorts of shapes and combinations of the animals that comprise the beast, until I found a balance that felt right. Though I wanted to find a shape and style of bunyip that portrayed it as fierce and terrifying, I also played with some concepts that made it appear more dog-like or seal-like.

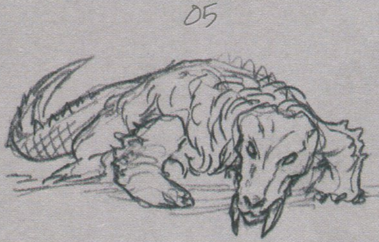
In some of the thumbnails I tried out different limbs and body types. In the thumbnails with a walrus body, the bunyip looks too comical. More dog-like thumbnails make it appear a bit too friendly. The crocodile body seems to work well for the creature, as crocodiles also live in swamps, but a balance of both dog and crocodile gives the beast a much more intimidating stance. However, it is still useful to investigate other sizes and shapes. I end up avoiding the pure seal-bodied variety, as it seems less intimidating and looks like something you could very easily outrun. The dog–crocodile hybrid conveys a good amount of power and speed that suggests it would not be possible to outrun the bunyip if it was chasing you.

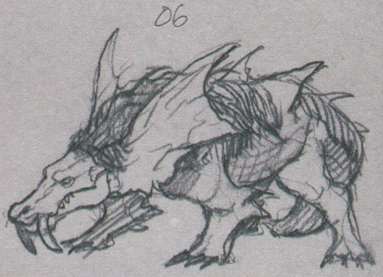


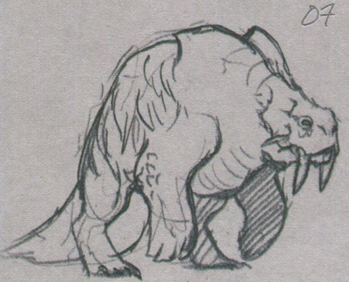


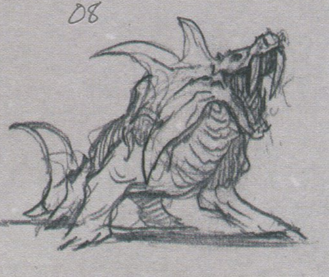


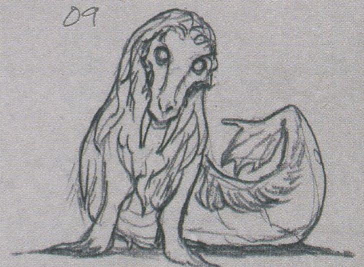


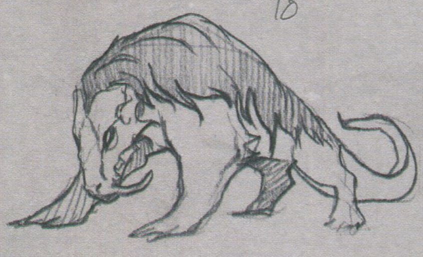


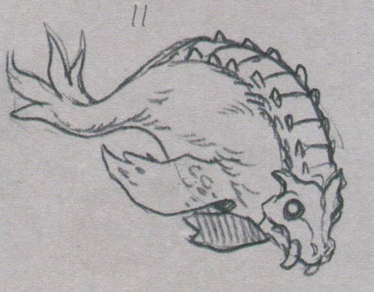


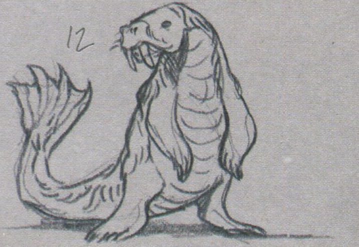










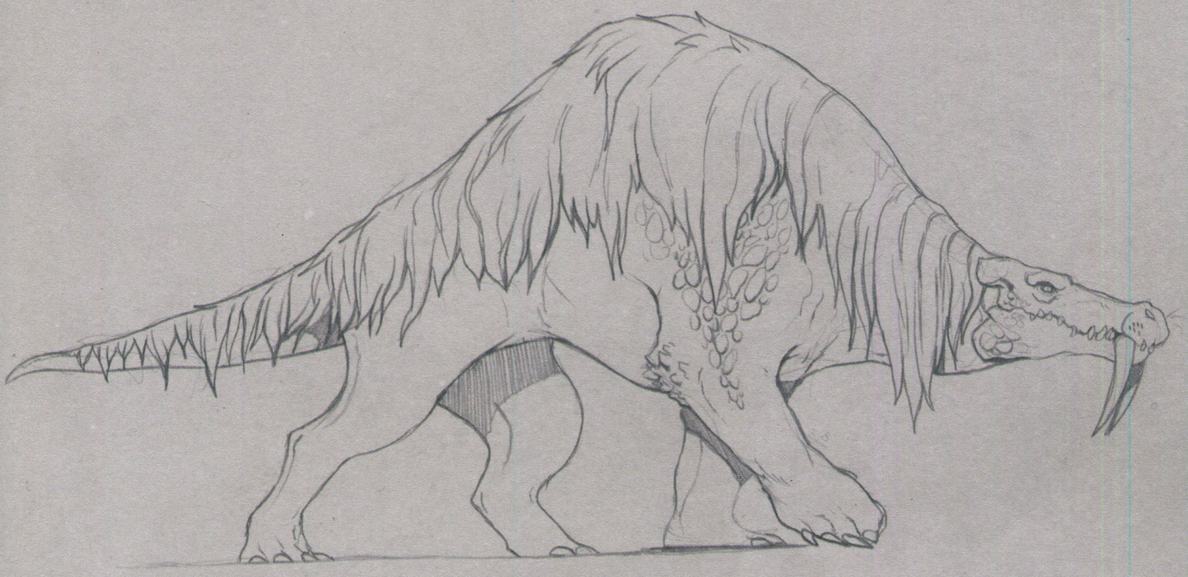


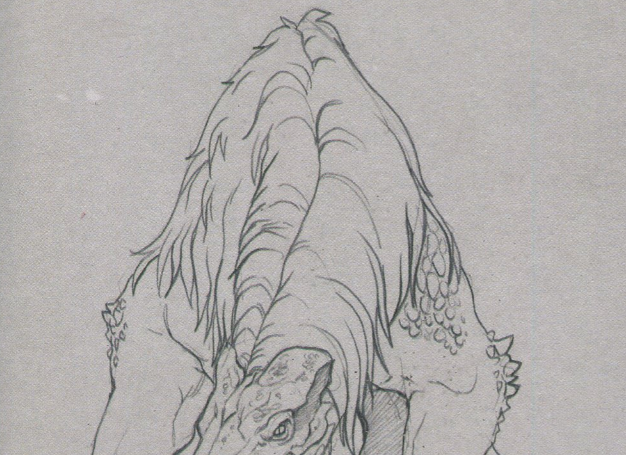
Further exploration

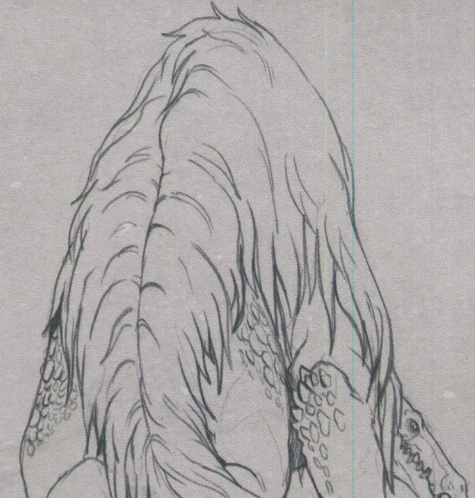
I decided to take on the look of the dog–crocodile for the bunyip. This variation works as a balance between long hair and crocodile features. From the side view, you can observe a distinctive silhouette that highlights the curvature of the hump in the spine and the length of the hair. It serves as a great mascot of power and speed, with crocodile scales on the exposed body parts, and hair draping over its head and body like a wet clump of moss. In reality, you would certainly not want to see this silhouette in the distance!

From the front, you can observe the intensity of the beast's face and stare. The creature has a lurking appearance, with the way the head bows down and the hump rises up in the distance.

The back of the creature provides us with a look at the length of the tail and a more mysterious glance at the face from a distance. You can also note how the fur works its way down from the body in to the tail.



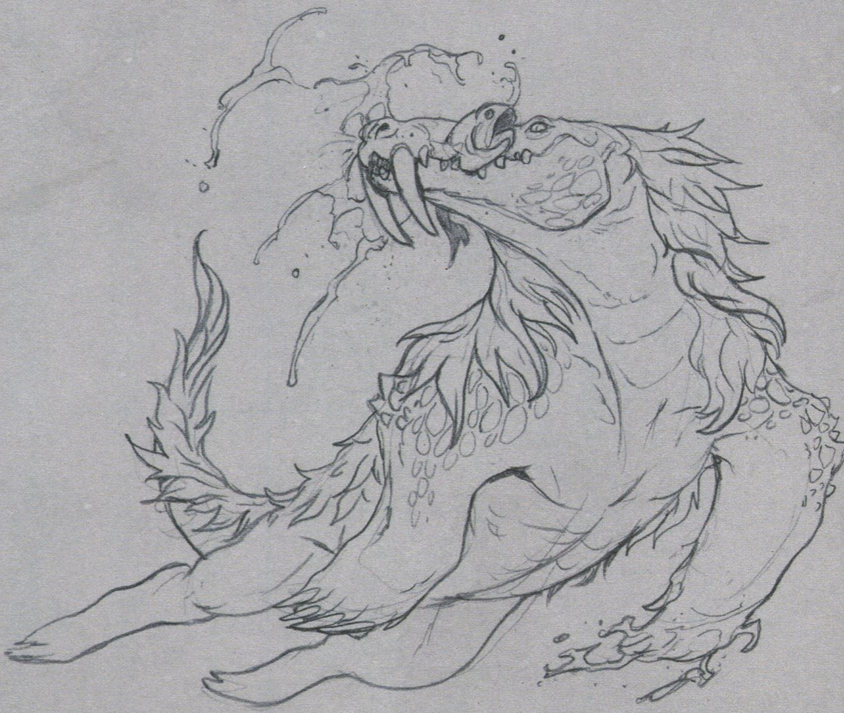


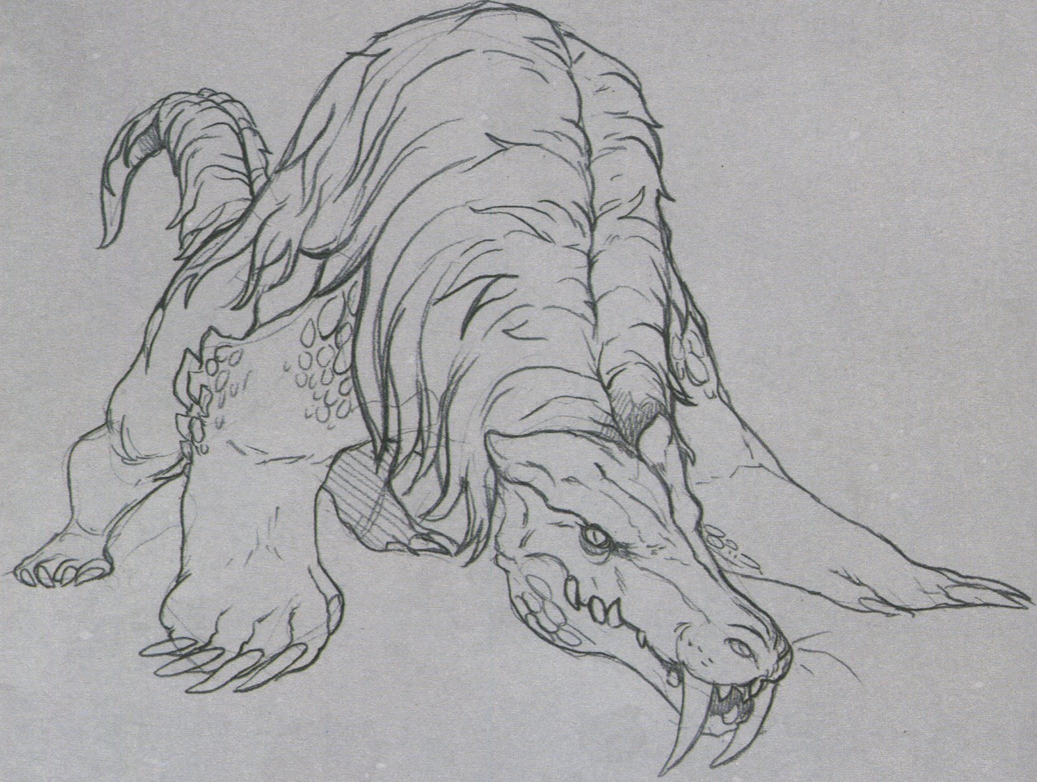


Poses

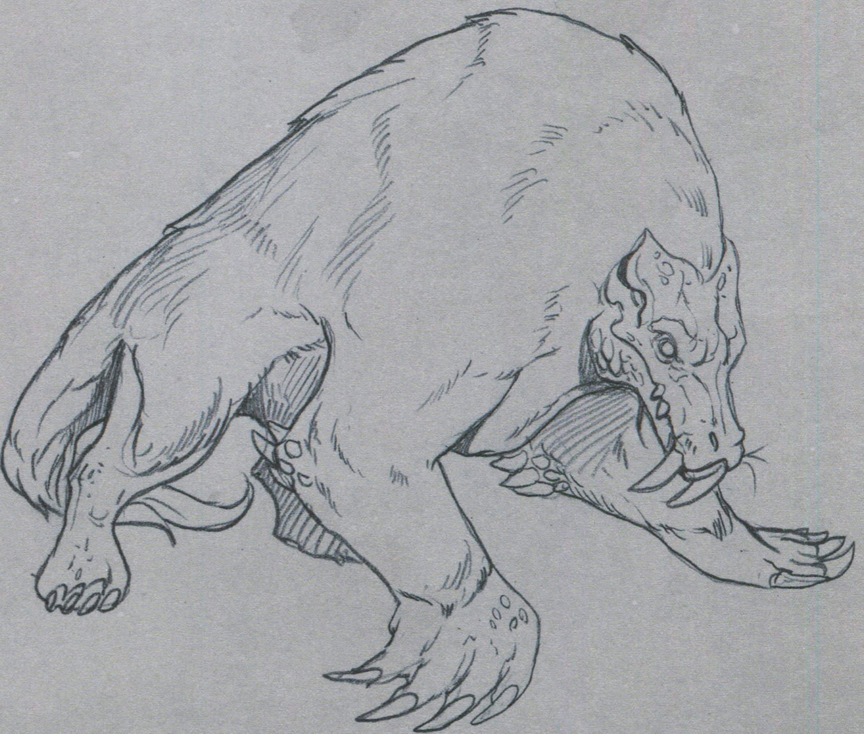
I try to think of good poses for the bunyip that show the creature at its full power and potential ferocity. The first pose shown here gives a good indication of how the bunyip appears at its most healthy and agile. It offers us a powerful look at the body of the beast as it hunts and leaps, which is akin to how crocodiles ambush their prey straight up out of the water.

The second pose takes some ideas from the front view that we saw on the previous page. It offers us a look straight into the creature's eyes as it skulks forward like a panther in the bushes. It presents the bunyip in its environment, the moment before it ambushes its prey and takes it by surprise. However, it does not offer as good of a look at the whole body of the creature, and feels weaker and less energetic than the previous variation.





• SUBSPECIES •

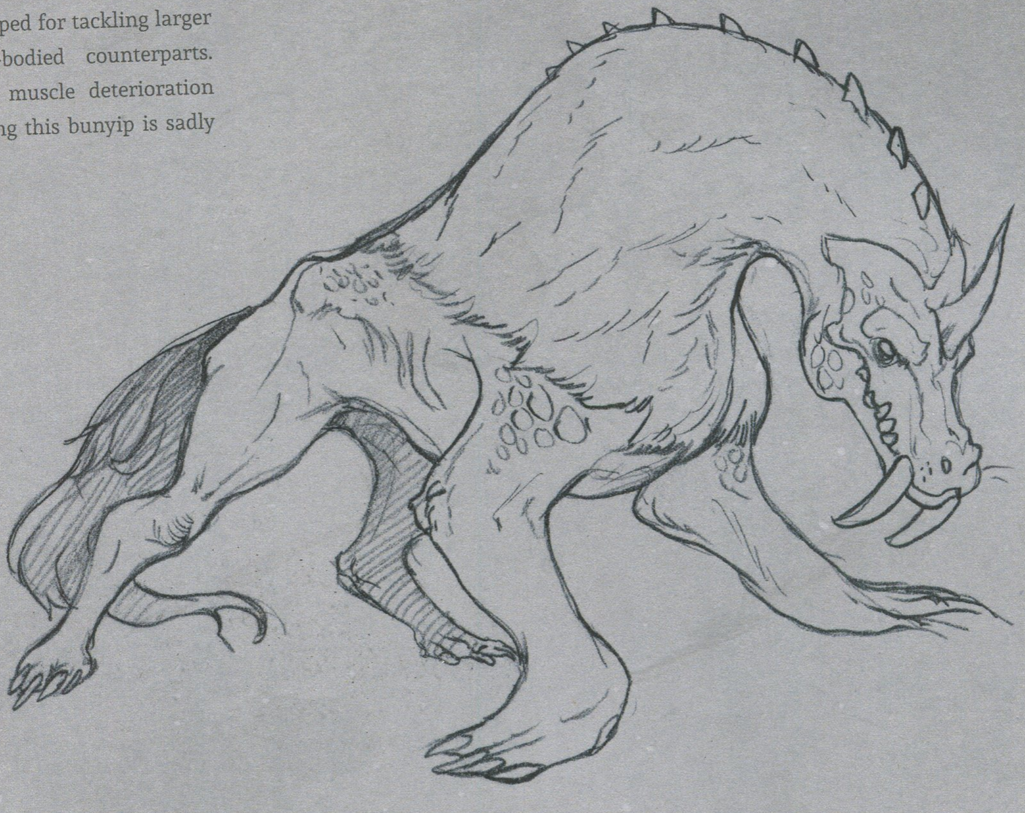


Short-haired bunyip

The short-haired bunyip is closely related to the common bunyip, but its body has a sleeker and more seal-like appearance. The hair is shorter and covers most of the body, including the belly and arms. The crocodile scaling typical of the common bunyip is dramatically less apparent and localized to the hands and face. This does give the creature a more friendly appearance compared to its cousin; however, underneath it is equally as dangerous and can cover short distances at great speed.

Horned bunyip

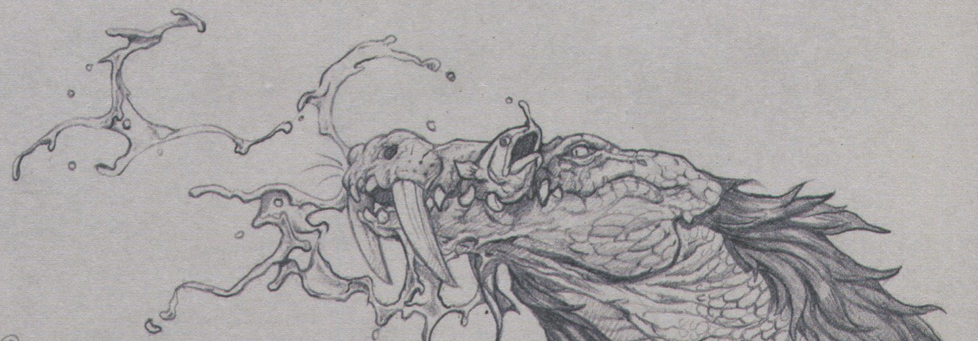
This subspecies is a more macabre version of the bunyip. The horn on the head gives it a fierce appearance while the sleeker-bodied silhouette is designed for speed. This breed also has a fuzzier tail and spikes along its spine. Evolutionarily speaking, this bunyip has not survived well. Its more frail body structure means it is not as equipped for tackling larger prey as its broader-bodied counterparts. Starvation has led to muscle deterioration in its hind legs, meaning this bunyip is sadly nearing extinction.



• FINAL DESIGN •

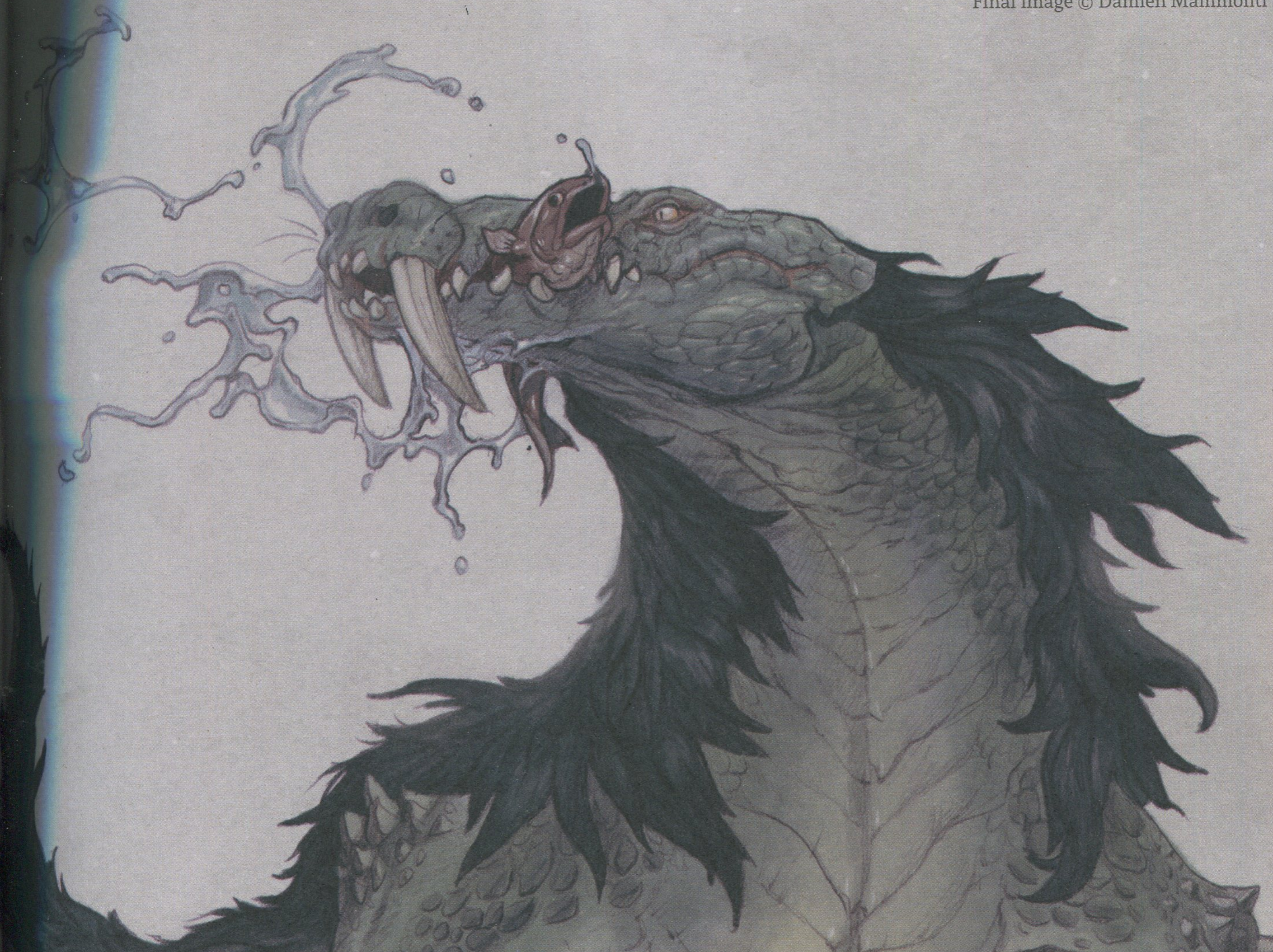
In this final version of the bunyip, we see the power and energy of the creature in full form. The flippers are modest and look as if they can be used for swimming or running in equal measure. The head is primarily reptilian, with a dog's larger snout and whiskers, and large walrus tusks. The hair has an energetic flow across the body, and the powerful maw snaps up prey with little effort. The front arms are broad and powerful; the tail is long and capable of excellent balance.

Splashes of water offer a look into the environment of the creature, so we know that along with its crocodilian appearance, it does live in and hunt in the swamp water. All in all, the bunyip is a powerful beast that anyone would be well to watch out for!

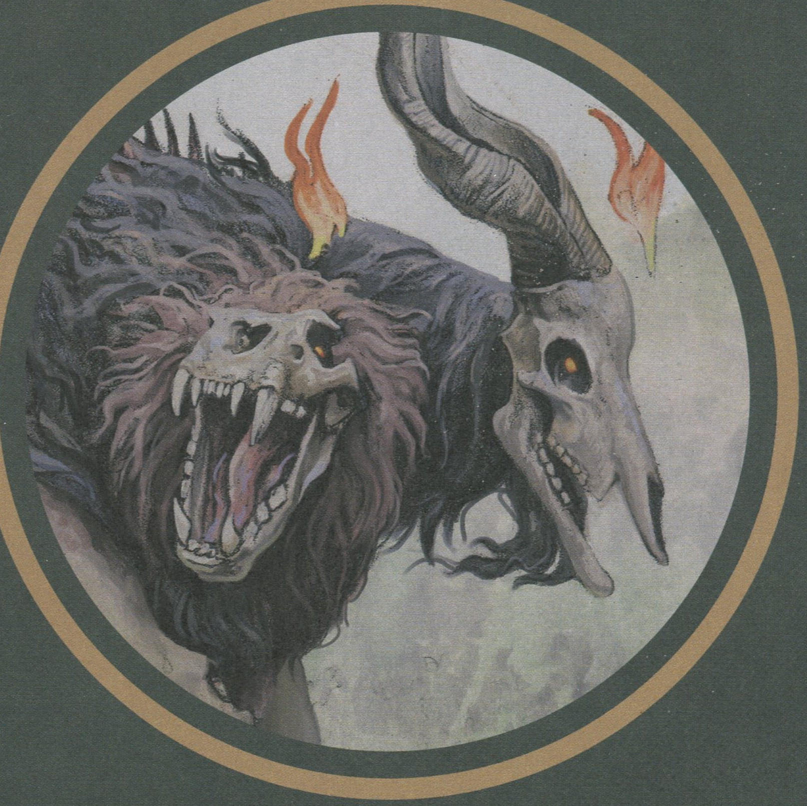


Key facts

Name: Bunyip
Taxonomy: Crocodile, dog, walrus
Region: Australia
Habitat: Swamps
Mythical abilities: Aquatic hunting
Threat to humans: 4



Final image © Damien Mammoliti



• CHIMERA •

The Chimera is a hybrid monster from ancient Greece, daughter of the giant Typhon and half-snake monster Echidna. It is an impressive beast worth seeing, but it is safer to stay far from it due to its temperament and the long range of its fiery breath – it is known to terrorize towns and cities. The Chimera is a beast that combines the body and head of a lion, the head of a goat, and a snake, although some purport the third creature to be a dragon with wings rather than a snake. It is usually reported to have three heads, with the lion and the goat at the front part of the body, and the snake's head located on the tail of the animal. The Chimera is a powerful beast that inspires fear; it spits fire from most of its heads and feeds on whatever prey it can find. It is also believed to be an omen of bad things to come.

• JOSHUA CAIRÓS •

Illustrator & concept artist • www.joshuacairos.com

•FIELD NOTES •

Lions

The Chimera has a lion's head, so I want to represent the animal's fierce and powerful nature. I study lions roaring and pay close attention to the wrinkles and shapes formed in their muzzle; these are very important details which will express the Chimera's fury and create an intimidating appearance. A subtle detail is the pale line of color that lions have under their eyes. This is very characteristic of lions and gives them their distinctive look.

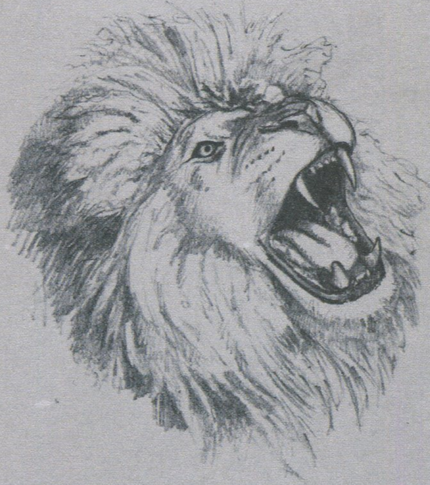
Studying a lion's head in profile helps me to better understand the facial anatomy, shapes, and distance between the eyes, nose, and mouth. I will try to keep the facial wrinkles in mind, such as the lines that go from the snout to the eyes and cheeks. What distinguishes a lion the most is its mane, and this offers a lot of fun possibilities in terms of making the design more elegant or fiercer.

Goats and antelopes

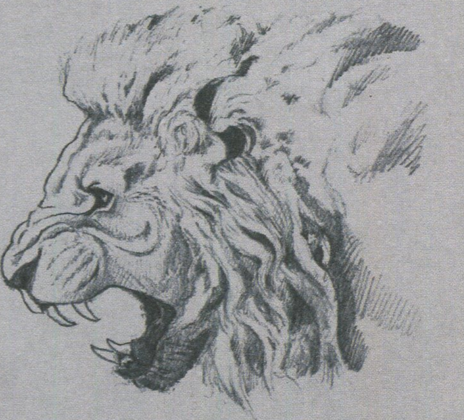
For hundreds of years the goat has been associated with demonic symbolism, which lends an infernal aspect to the Chimera. The most important elements to study here are the horns and beard, which will combine well with the lion's long hair. The goat itself is not very intimidating, but thanks to the horns it can appear much more serious. I also study the horns of an antelope as their twisted shapes could fit better with the Chimera's anatomy; the goat's more horizontal horns might collide and hinder the lion's head.

Movement

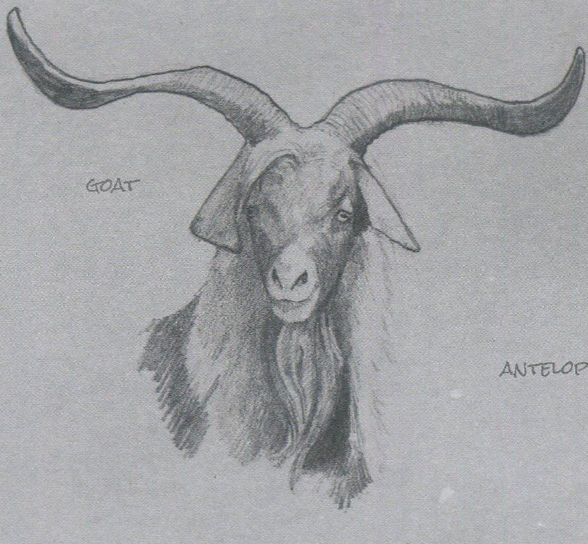
In addition, I explore the movement, essence, and pose of the animal. The Chimera has a lion's body, so to make the drawing feel more natural it is important to study the way a lion runs and holds itself. Using clear, fluid lines will better capture that sensation of movement which will convey the wild nature of the Chimera.



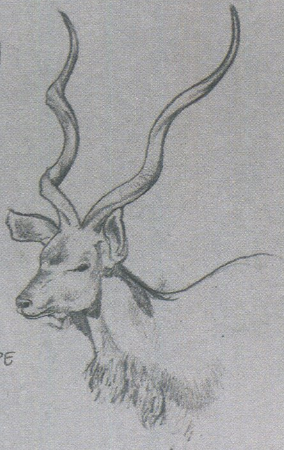
LION
ROARING



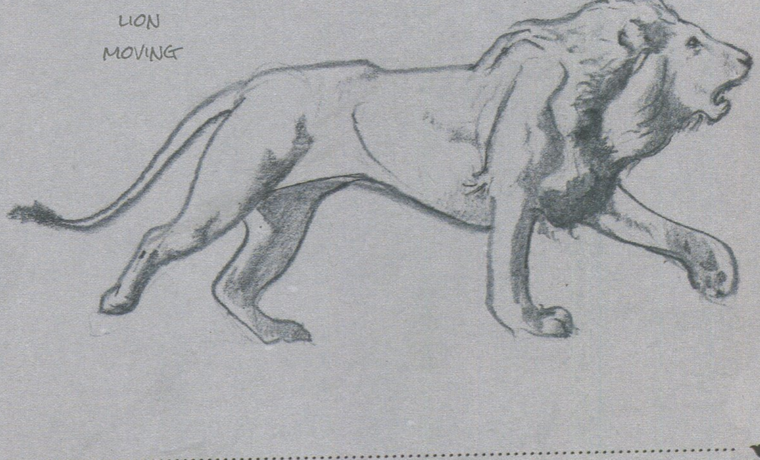
LION FROM
A SIDE VIEW



GOAT



ANTELOPE



LION
MOVING

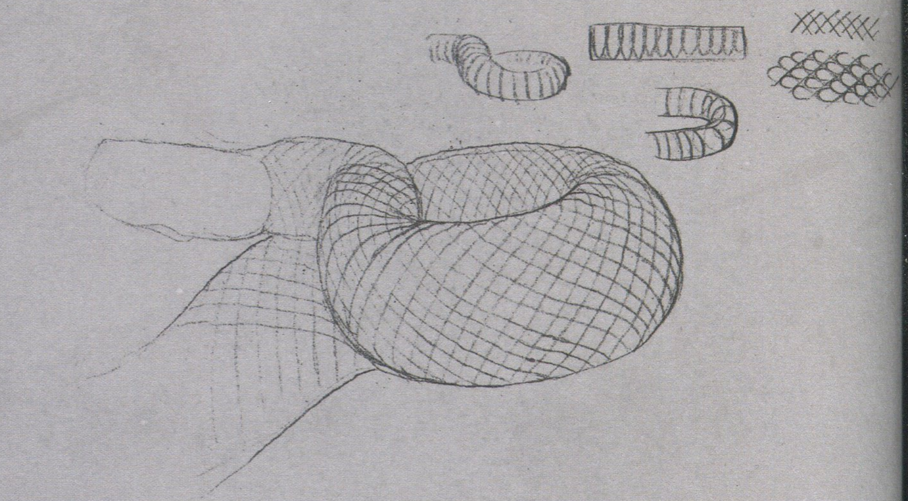
Snake skin

In order to create snake skin, I first think about the volume of the body. I draw a spring or coil to capture the shape and energy of the forms; here I must be very clear with the direction and curve of the body. Once I have that I apply diagonal lines, some to the right and others to the left. I adapt them to the follow the snake's form; this should create a diamond pattern all over the body.

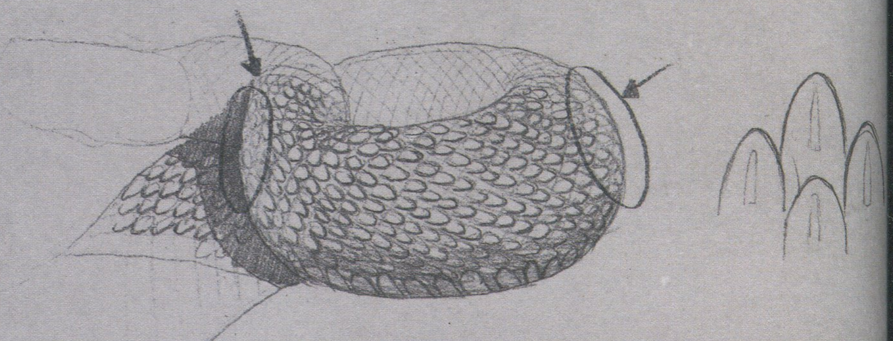
Next I fill in the diamond pattern with scales. I do not need to be precise, except with the parts that are facing other sides. There is no need to detail where the foreshortening is because the shapes become blurry due to the perspective. Now I can start to add in the first shadows, just enough to give the drawing a three-dimensional feel.

Now it is time to add a pattern to the skin. To start I make a simple drawing of the basic shapes; all I need to do then is apply that to the scales as if they were pixels I have to paint. Once this is done I work on the volumes of the snake, adding shadows along the body to add a sense of realism. If you follow these steps you will be able to add any pattern you want. Be as creative as you like; you can even deform the diagonal lines from the first step to create different sized scales.

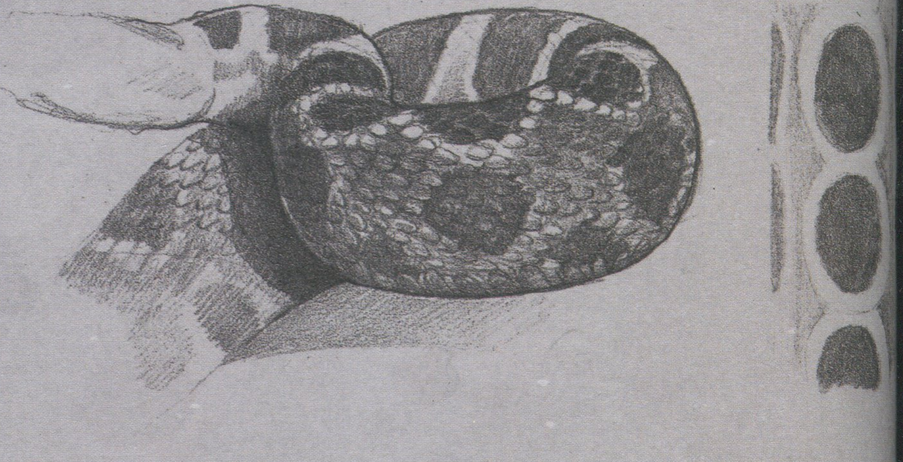
APPLYING INTERSECTING DIAGONAL LINES TO A COIL SHAPE



USING PERSPECTIVE TO SUGGEST THREE DIMENSIONS



ADDING PATTERN AND SHADOW

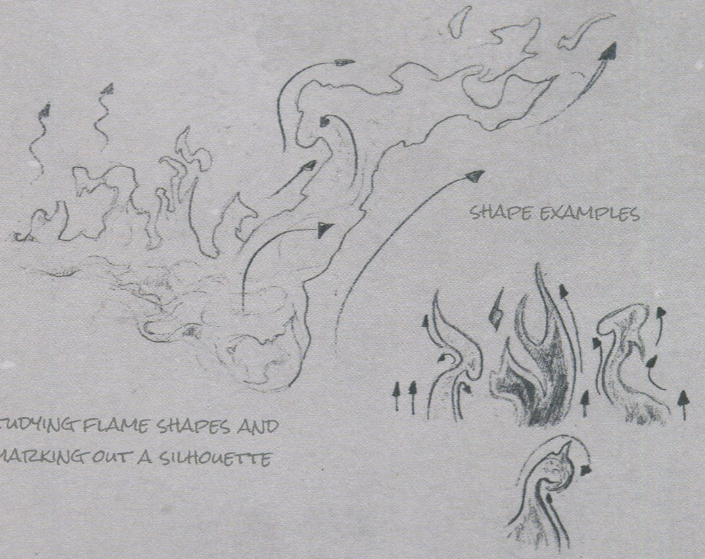


Fire

I also want to incorporate flames into my design, as the Chimera is known to be fire-breathing. Drawing fire can be quite complex because as well as the shapes you need to consider the wind direction and think in three dimensions. I play with different shapes and twist the flames to give the impression that wind is moving them around. I use curves and rounded shapes to create a pleasing silhouette, keeping the shapes of the flame and the negative spaces (such as a black background) in mind. In this step I only have to worry about creating a silhouette for the fire and creating some guides to help you visualize the movements of the flames better.

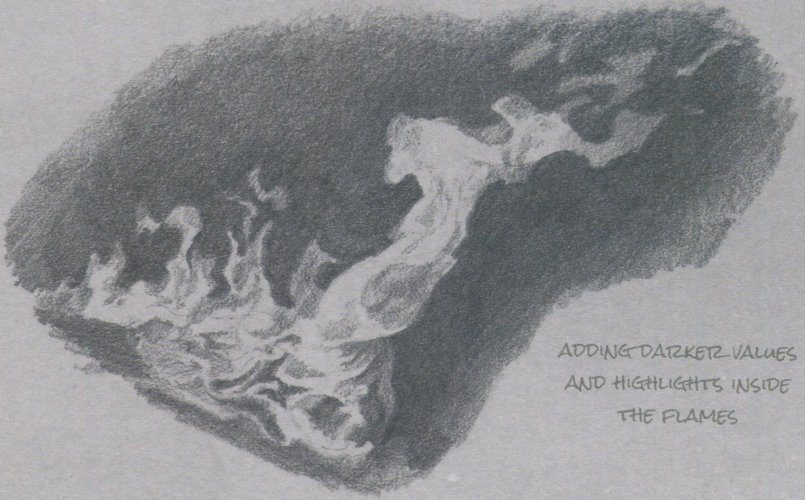
Leave the fire's silhouette blank and fill the background with a very dark value – as this is fire it is necessary to give the impression of illumination. I then add some darker values inside the fire, paying attention to where I place those darker values: I draw the dark shapes so that the white spaces have a flame shape. Flames have highlights and transparent areas so I keep this in mind as I softly shade some parts of the fire. Fire goes from a white hot core, passing through yellows and oranges to finally end in reds, so I softly shade the different values from the lightest in the inside to the darker edges.

In this last step I apply the same process as in the previous steps but this time to add details to areas of interest within the flames. I keep the hottest parts pure white to maximize the realism. I play inside the dark areas created in the previous step to further enhance those areas, and sketch smaller flames that will make the fire look more realistic. I try to darken the background as much as I can and create gradients with interesting curves that go from the background to the fire. Always try to keep the whole image in mind while working on any one section; this will help to keep your gray values consistent.

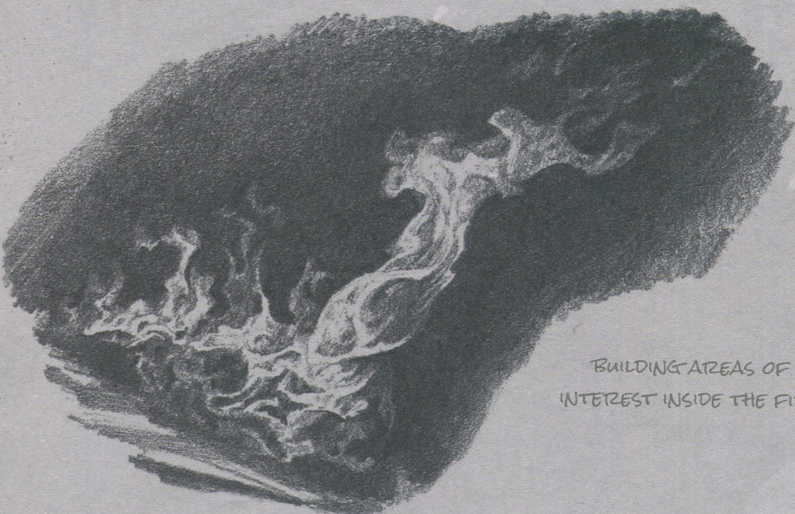


SHAPE EXAMPLES

STUDYING FLAME SHAPES AND MARKING OUT A SILHOUETTE



ADDING DARKER VALUES AND HIGHLIGHTS INSIDE THE FLAMES



BUILDING AREAS OF INTEREST INSIDE THE FIRE

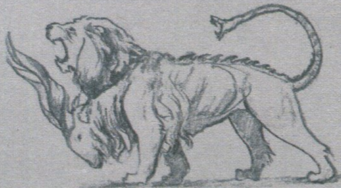
• DESIGN PROCESS •

Thumbnails

In these thumbnails, I investigated the structure of the Chimera and experimented with its anatomy, making it thin and bony in some sketches and more muscular in others. I even played with the curvatures of the spine and looked at the horns and size of the snake. As I worked on the thumbnails I realized that a longer snake looked much better because it appears more menacing and threatening.

I experimented with combining the goat and the lion into the same head rather than having two separate heads. I also tried adding a more demonic appearance by giving some of the sketches wings. To create more of a fantasy look I added some dragon elements, including spines along the back and down the hind legs, as well as scales all over the whole body. To give a really sinister and dreadful feel to the Chimera, I decided to draw the final thumbnail without any eyes – it looks quite disturbing!

01



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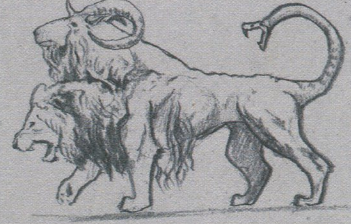

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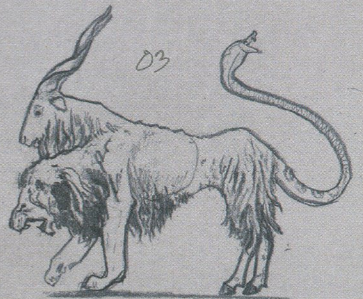

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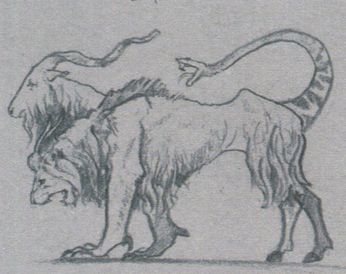

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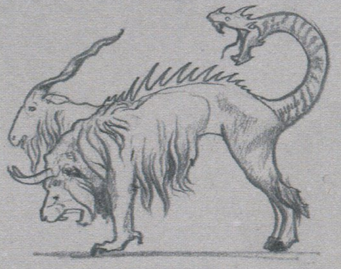

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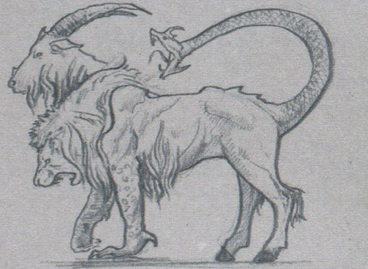

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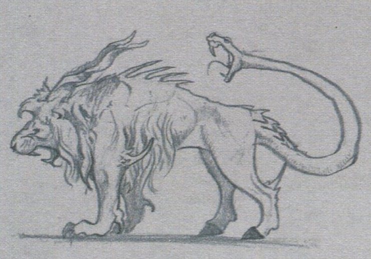

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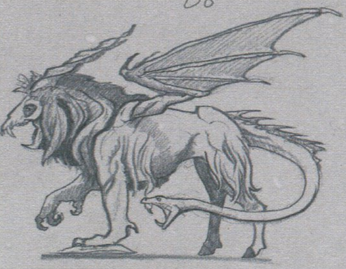

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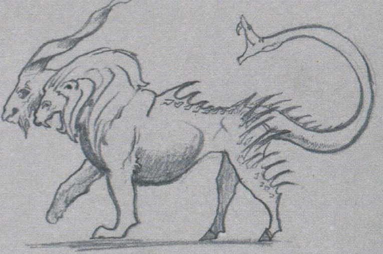

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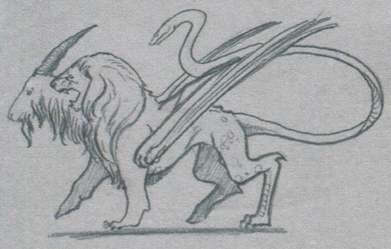

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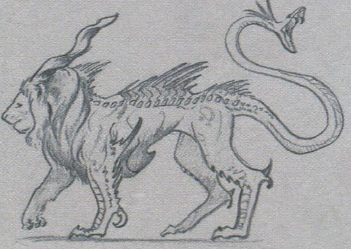

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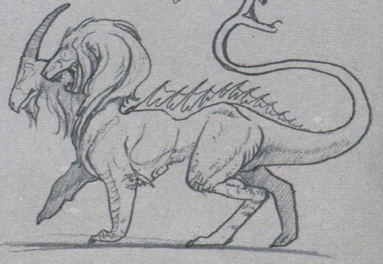


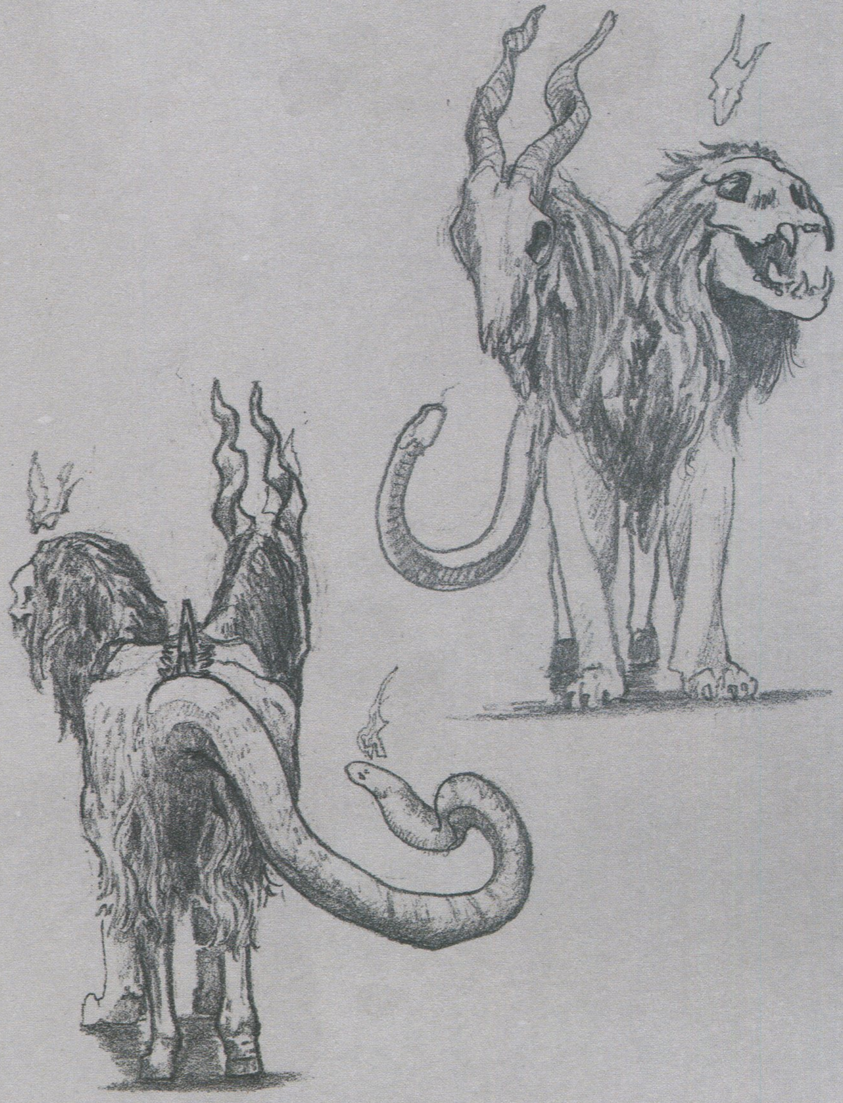
Further exploration

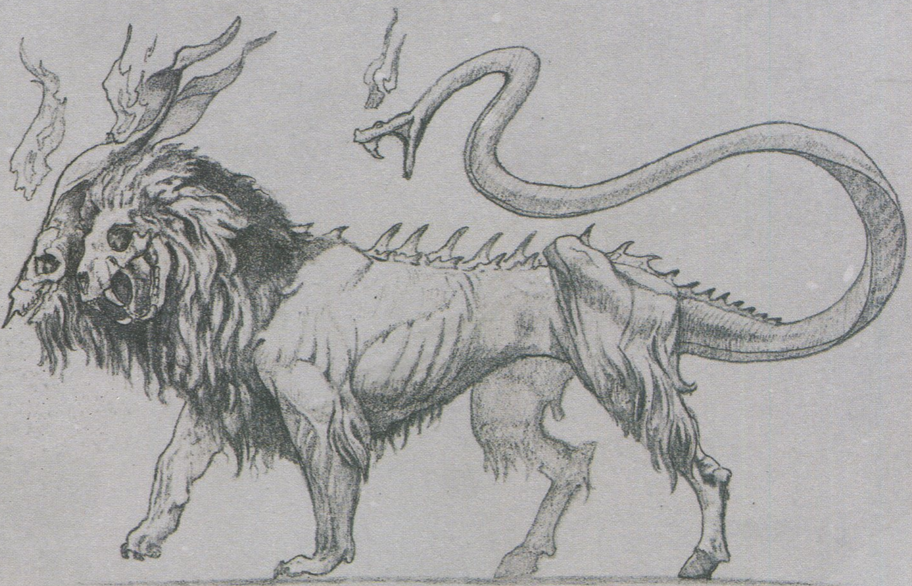
I chose a skeletal Chimera to take forward because I think the parts fit perfectly together and it has a modern, original design giving the Chimera an updated look – that of a dark and dreadful beast. The skulls combined with the furry mane and beard are terrifying, conjuring up images of death and shrunken heads.

From the front the two heads are easily distinguished from one another and you can see how they both fit onto the torso. This view shows the ferociousness of the predator skull and the eerie demonic goat's skull. This really shows off the undead nature of the creature – it appears as if it is eternally hungry and always on the hunt for prey.

From behind you can clearly see that the hind legs are those of a goat. They are skinny and bony, although much of this is hidden beneath the thick fur – it brings to mind the goats that live in cold, mountainous areas. This view also shows off the thickness of the snake as it leaves the body and tapers gently down to end with the snake's vicious maw.

In profile the two heads, although separate, look unified thanks to the fur around the heads and neck. The spines running down the back are clearly visible and gradually blend into the body of the snake. This view is also good for seeing the emaciated look of the beast, especially in the prominent hips. The flames above the key elements convey the creature's fiery, magical, and destructive nature, and are aesthetically pleasing in the way they mimic the shape language and angles of the fur, horns, and skulls.

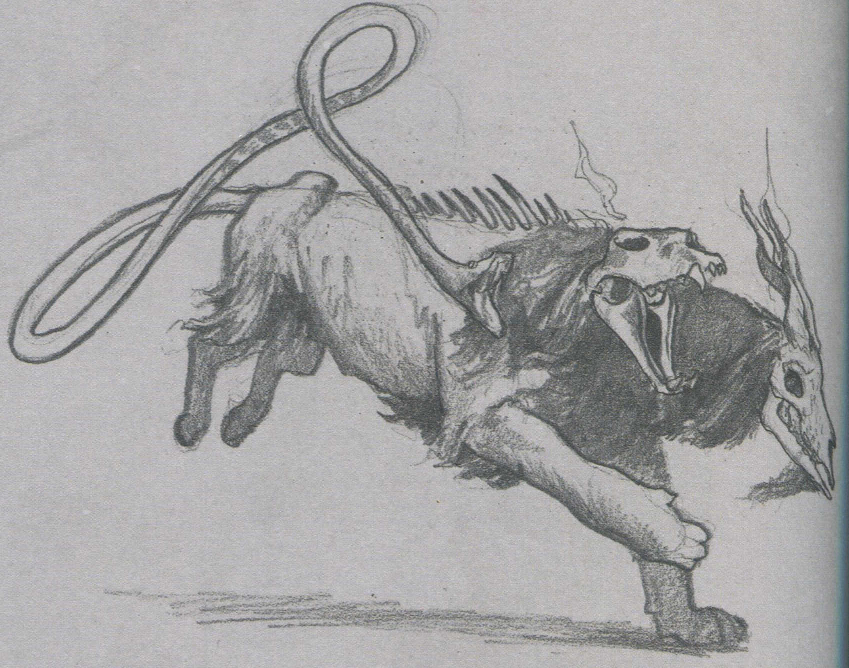


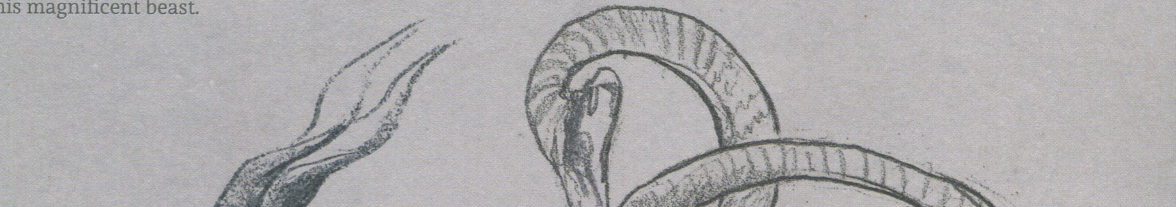


Poses

In this first pose I tried to capture the aggression, speed, and energy of the animal. I looked at how a feline's front legs move and combined this with the jumping of a goat at the rear. All the heads are looking in the same direction, which helps to draw a shape that will attract the viewer's attention. It also gives the snake a prominent position and a life of its own – it is a creature in its own right and will attack you when you least expect it.

The pose below is much calmer than the previous one. I wanted to imbue the animal with a personality based on greatness and serenity, with the hair flowing in the wind and the tail twisting. The lion's head is intimidatingly glancing back at the viewer, analyzing and working out if they are a threat (or edible). This pose evokes a different feeling to the leaping Chimera above; it is less threatening but rather summons a feeling of respect for this magnificent beast.





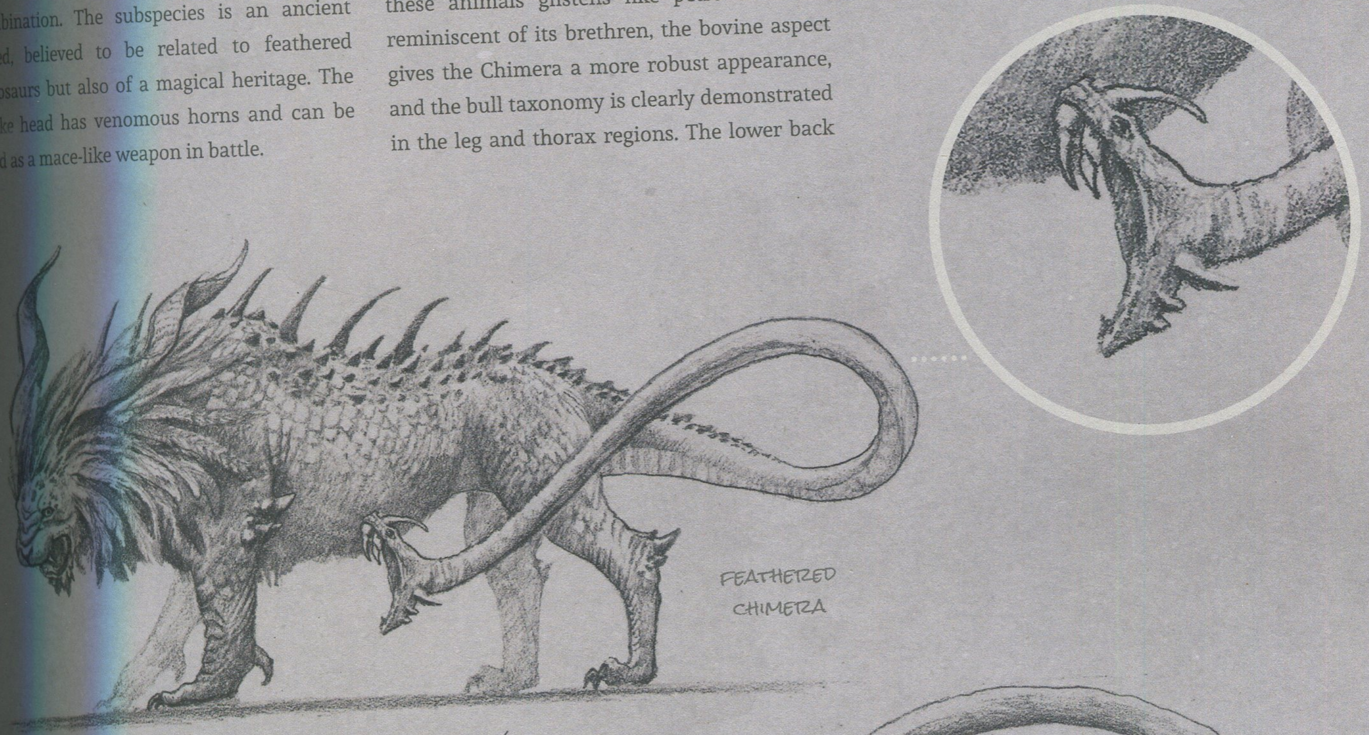
• SUBSPECIES •

Feathered Chimera

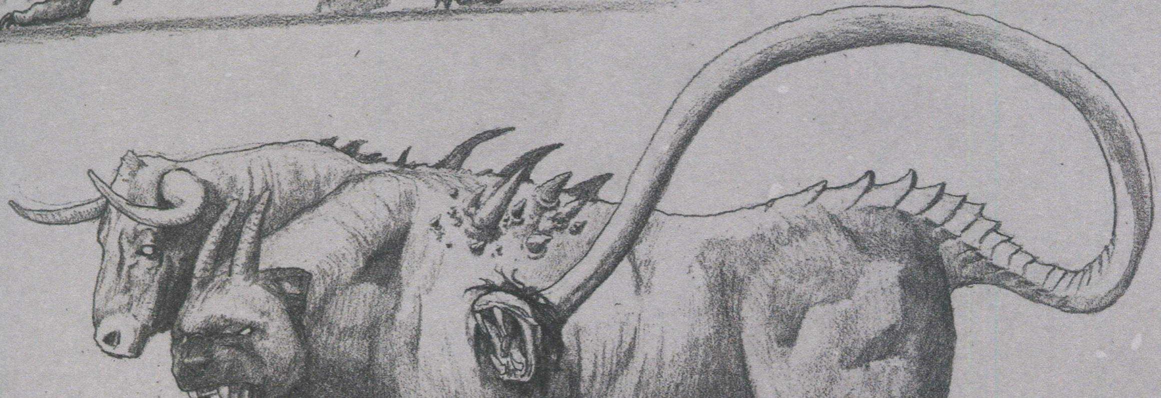
The feathered Chimera combines the goat, lion, and snake in a single creature, with scales uniting the whole body. Rather than lion hair the beast has a mane comprised of long feathers, which offers a visually stunning combination. The subspecies is an ancient breed, believed to be related to feathered dinosaurs but also of a magical heritage. The snake head has venomous horns and can be used as a mace-like weapon in battle.

Bovine Chimera

This subspecies has different types of heads compared to its common cousin: the head of a bull rather than a goat, and the head of a panther rather than a lion. When under sunlight, the bright black hair of both of these animals glistens like petroleum. Still reminiscent of its brethren, the bovine aspect gives the Chimera a more robust appearance, and the bull taxonomy is clearly demonstrated in the leg and thorax regions. The lower back and top part of the tail are armored like an armadillo, offering the beast extra defense when fighting.



FEATHERED CHIMERA

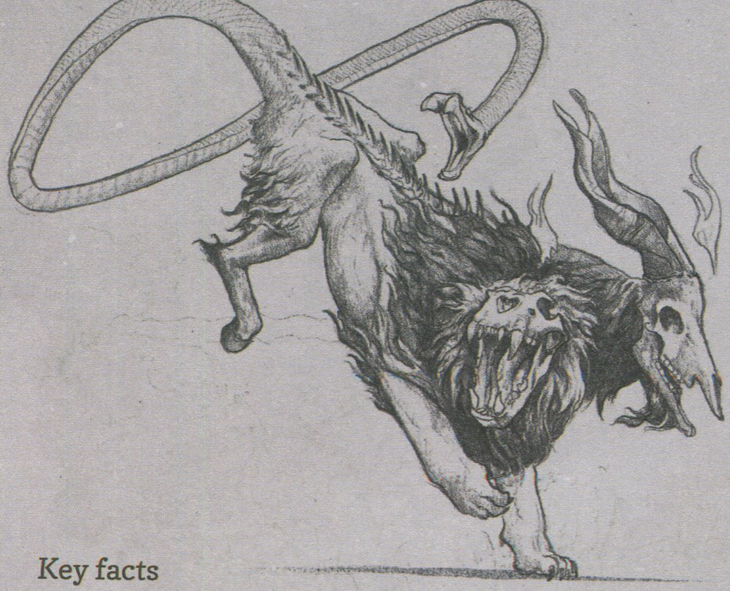


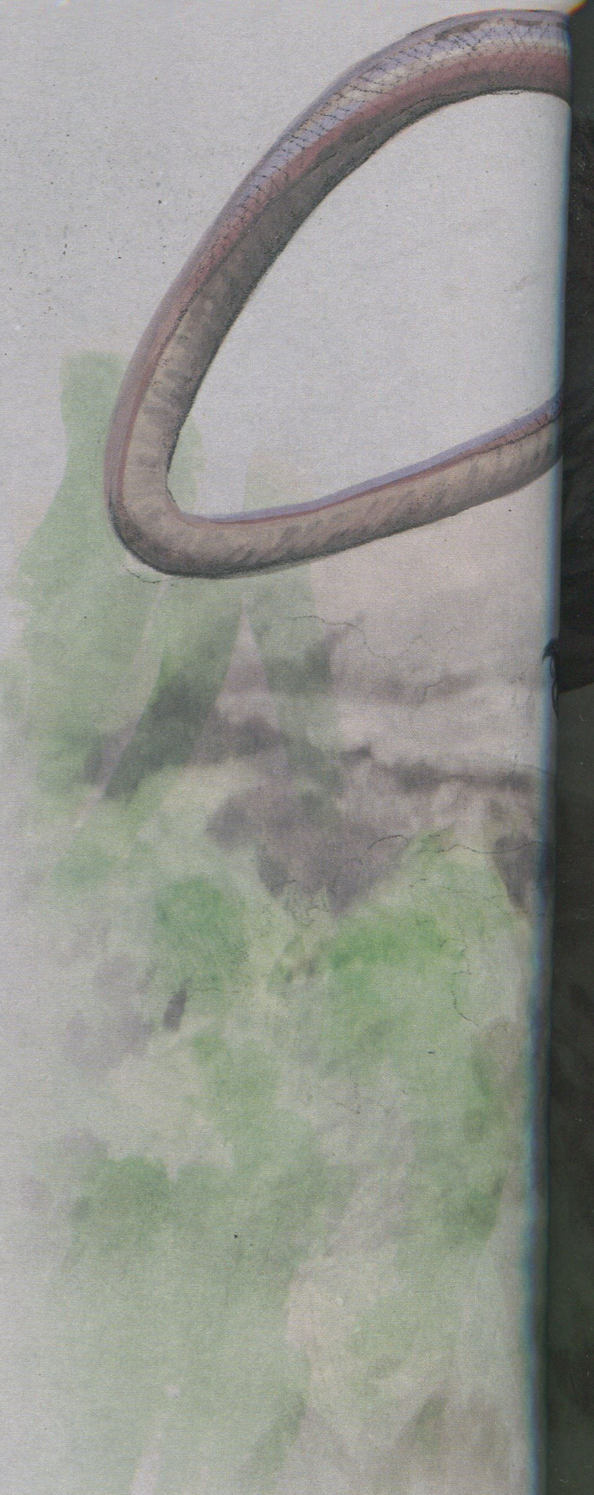
BOVINE CHIMERA

• FINAL DESIGN •

The pose for the final design is terrifying and energetic, and perfect for showing off the way that the individual parts come together to form this hybrid beast. Truly horrifying to look at, the demonic appearance is enhanced by the fleshless skulls and cloven hooves. The body is very lean, almost skeletal, and the white bones stand out in stark contrast with the dark fur and mane. It is unknown whether this Chimera is actually undead or just appears to be because no explorer has got close enough to verify this and lived.

I wanted to bring the snake to life and give it a touch of individuality, so it is clear that it is capable of acting and moving on its own. The two main heads look in opposite directions in order to give the pose a richer and more dynamic appearance; it is also easier to distinguish the two heads from one another if they are looking in different directions. The lion and the snake both have their mouths wide open in clear signs of aggression.

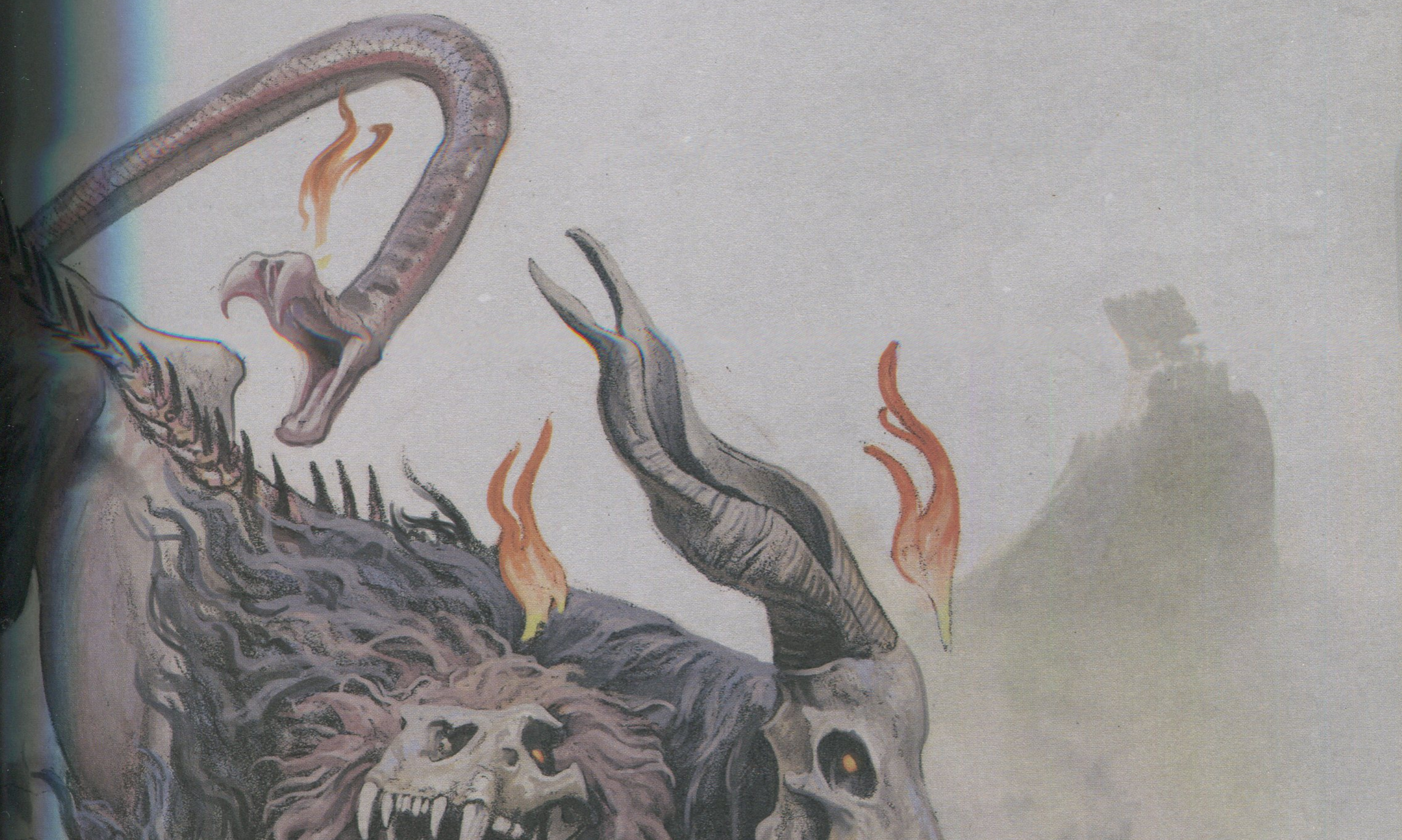


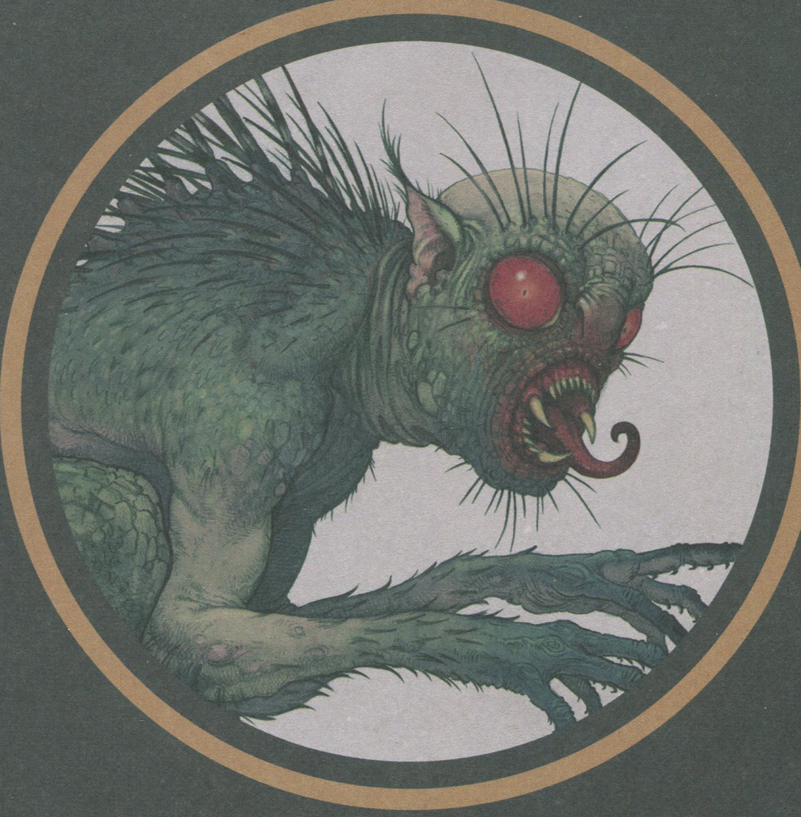


Key facts

Name: Chimera
Taxonomy: Lion, goat, snake
Region: Greece
Habitat: Mediterranean
Mythical abilities: Fire-breathing
Threat to humans: 4

Final image © Joshua Cairós





• CHUPACABRA •

The chupacabra is a horrific creature originating from Central and South America. The name "chupacabra" means "goat-sucker," derived fro
Spanish words *chupar* (to suck) and *cabras* (goat). Descriptions of the chupacabra vary, but it is said that this creature usually stands about thr
four feet tall. It is a nocturnal creature with powerful legs that allow it to leap huge distances. Its long fingers with sharp claws make it a terri
hunter. It has an oval head and two huge, bright red glowing eyes. Often referred to as reptilian in appearance, it has leathery or scaly gree
gray skin and sharp spines or quills running down its back, ending with a short tail. A chupacabra emits a terrible smell of decaying meat.
main proof of this creature's existence is the numerous bodies of dead goats and other domestic animals with peculiar wounds. All of these
animals have three puncture wounds on their chest or neck and are completely drained of blood. The first reported attacks occurred in 199
Puerto Rico, but some would point out that even ancient Mayans spoke of a frightening creature lurking in the dark that meets the descriptio
the chupacabra.

• EDIN DURMISEVIC •

Character & concept artist • edind.artstation.com

• FIELD NOTES •

Tarsiers

The chupacabra has big red eyes that are a dominant element of its face. It is rarely seen in daylight, so I explore some of nature's nocturnal creatures that also have big eyes, such as the Philippine tarsier. This creature sees in the dark and its eyes look quite alien and creepy, which makes it a great reference to influence my design.

Hands and plants

When I research for a new creature, I try to build it around the anatomy of real animals to make the design more believable. But sometimes I explore some of nature's other extraordinary concepts to attain more originality. For the chupacabra's hands, I am inspired by a specific flower (burdock, of the family *Asteraceae*), for the simple reason that this plant sticks to things. Giving the creature the ability to firmly stick to its prey will add to the horror of the monster. For the overall structure of the chupacabra's hands, I will use humanoid, ape-like hands with opposable thumbs.

Monkeys

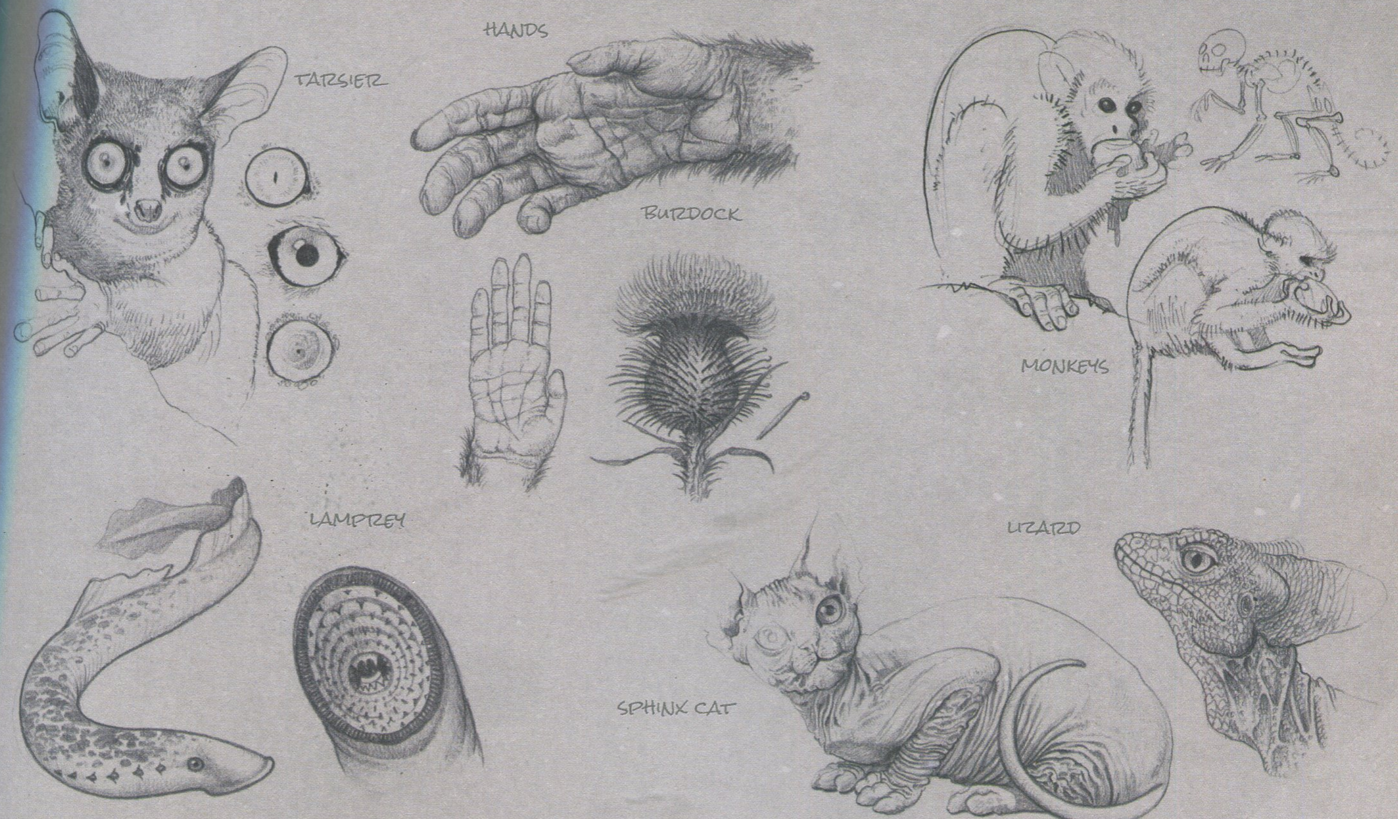
The pose will reveal a lot about the character of this creature. When monkeys eat, they stay alert to their environment, looking around. If the chupacabra is a creature that does not want to be seen, then this might be a behavior that it would exhibit. The way monkeys sit accentuates the arched back, which will be important for my chupacabra design – this way, the chupacabra's quills will be more prominent and threatening, making it appear more dangerous.

Bloodsucking mouths

The mouth of the chupacabra is very specific, as this creature does not usually leave a lot of evidence on its prey, apart from three puncture wounds. The mouth will need to look threatening and disgusting at the same time. I draw inspiration from some fish, such as the lamprey, and leeches that have the anatomy needed to suck the blood from an animal.

Skin

If the chupacabra does not come out in daylight, its skin might be pale or covered with small scales that are unsaturated in color. Animals like hairless moles and Sphynx cats have very interesting skin that could look disgusting or creepy if applied to a human-like creature, for example. Lizard skin would also add some complexity to skin texture. Skin folds are another feature I could incorporate as one of the chupacabra's skin characteristics.



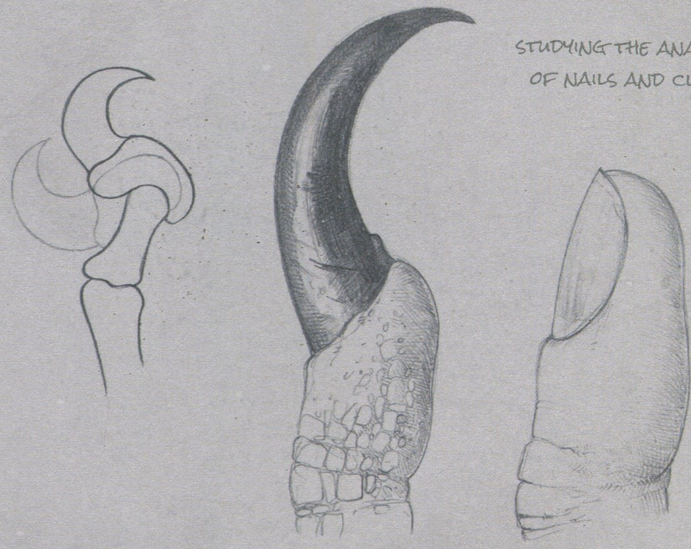
Sharp claws

The first thing that is important to understand and explore is the difference between claws and nails. I make sure I find good reference pictures on this subject. A nail is usually flat with a curved edge, and is part of the third phalanx (bony segment) of the finger. A claw is more curved and pointed, and can be retractable. From a structural standpoint, nails are homologous to claws, meaning nails are an evolutionary variation of the claw. Knowing these facts can help you make decisions on how to approach the design you have in mind.

When drawing and designing different claws, I think about the level of terror I want to achieve. Longer fingers with pointed ends are especially apt when designing a foul and creepy creature. I think about the shape of the claws and try to make them unique in some way.

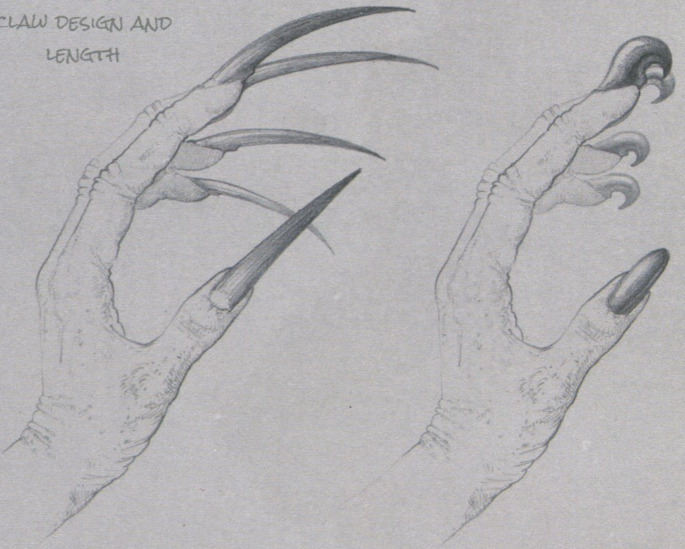
When designing claws, it is important to always think about the hand of the specific creature. Only by making the overall anatomy of the hand correct will your claw design be believable. I avoid making claws too big and robust in comparison to the fingers – bigger claws need bigger and stronger hands. Claws should seem like natural appendages to the fingers.

The size and overall shape of the claws should be readable at first glance. I avoid too many details and try to keep it simple. I know that too many details on small objects, like claws, make them appear too busy, so I use simple strokes just to define the volume. As claws are part of the bone that goes under the skin, I pay special attention to the base of the claw, making this part of the finger fleshier. When I am satisfied with the overall design of the claws, I add small cracks and wear, but still try to keep it relatively simple.

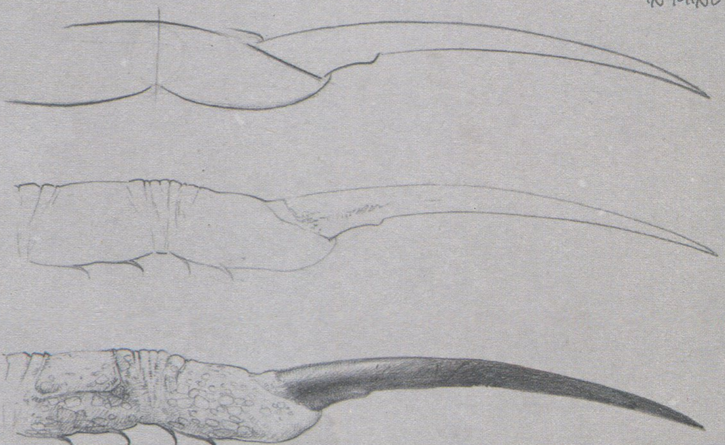


STUDYING THE ANATOMY OF NAILS AND CLAWS

EXPERIMENTING WITH CLAW DESIGN AND LENGTH



KEEPING ANATOMY IN MIND



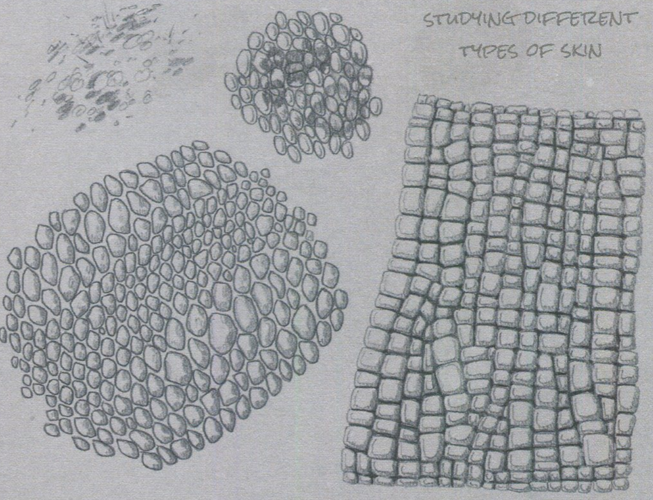
ADDING DETAIL AND WEAR

Skin and quills

First I find a lot of reference material and study different types of animal skin, such as that of lizards, snakes, and crocodiles. I often see people drawing things straight from their head but you should take your time and study reference material when starting any design. There is always an imperfection, interesting shape, or unexpected pattern that will give you a fresh perspective on the subject you are designing. Skin covers a huge part of an animal; many creatures and animals are visually defined by their skin, and in many cases skin suggests the conditions of the animal and its habitat.

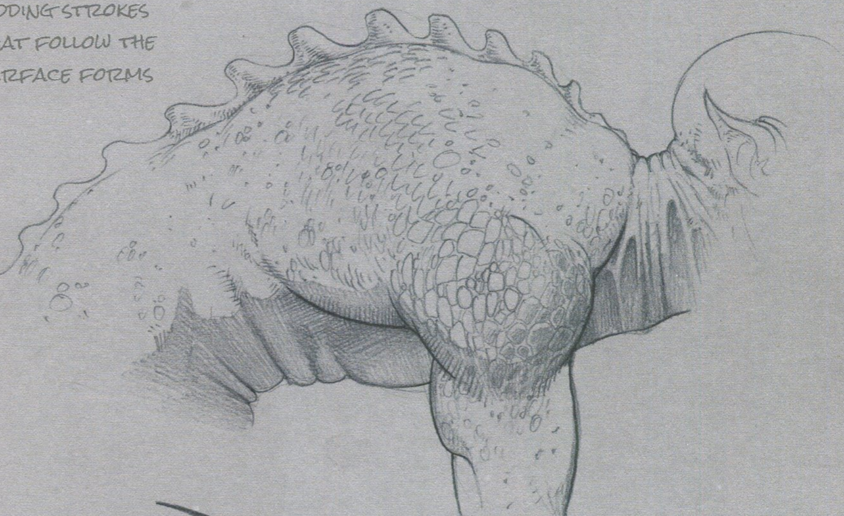
When drawing the skin, the main thing to establish is its overall structure. Lizard skin is a main element here, but using a greater variety of patterns will make the skin more interesting. The drawing at this stage should be loose, which will create a more harmonious surface. I try to define shadow areas on my creature early on. This is important because the texture and structure of the skin should be less visible in these area. I draw with strokes that follow the surface forms, as this reinforces the volumes and different shapes of the body.

When I am happy with the overall treatment of the skin, I take some time to focus on details such as hair, whiskers, and quills. This creature does not have fur, but some sparing hair details will reinforce its repulsive appearance. The quills and spikes that go down the chupacabra's back are a visually important element, so I give them special treatment. One way to distinguish quills is to give them a specific pattern and color; I also make the quills different in size and volume to create interest for the viewer.

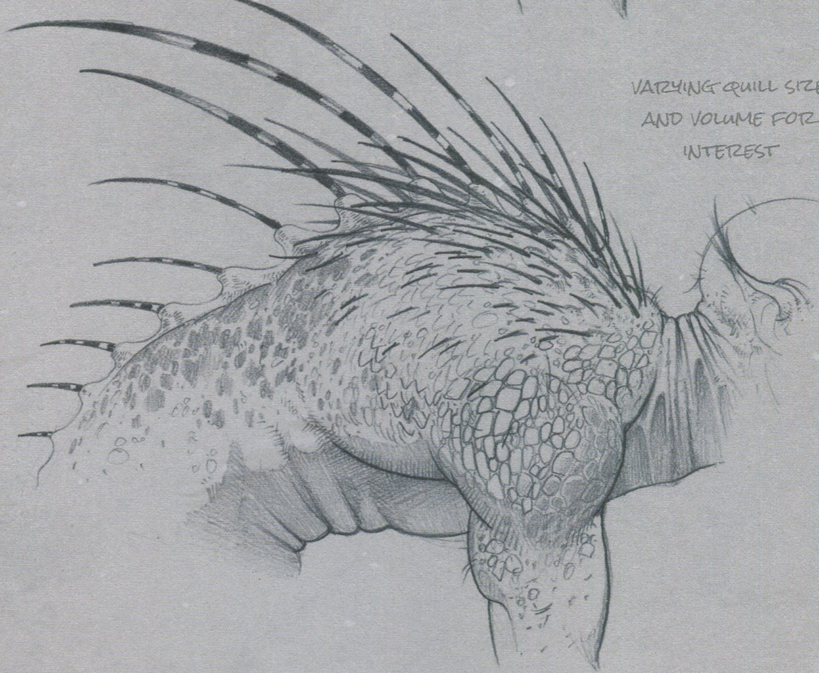


STUDYING DIFFERENT TYPES OF SKIN

ADDING STROKES THAT FOLLOW THE SURFACE FORMS



VARYING QUILL SIZE AND VOLUME FOR INTEREST



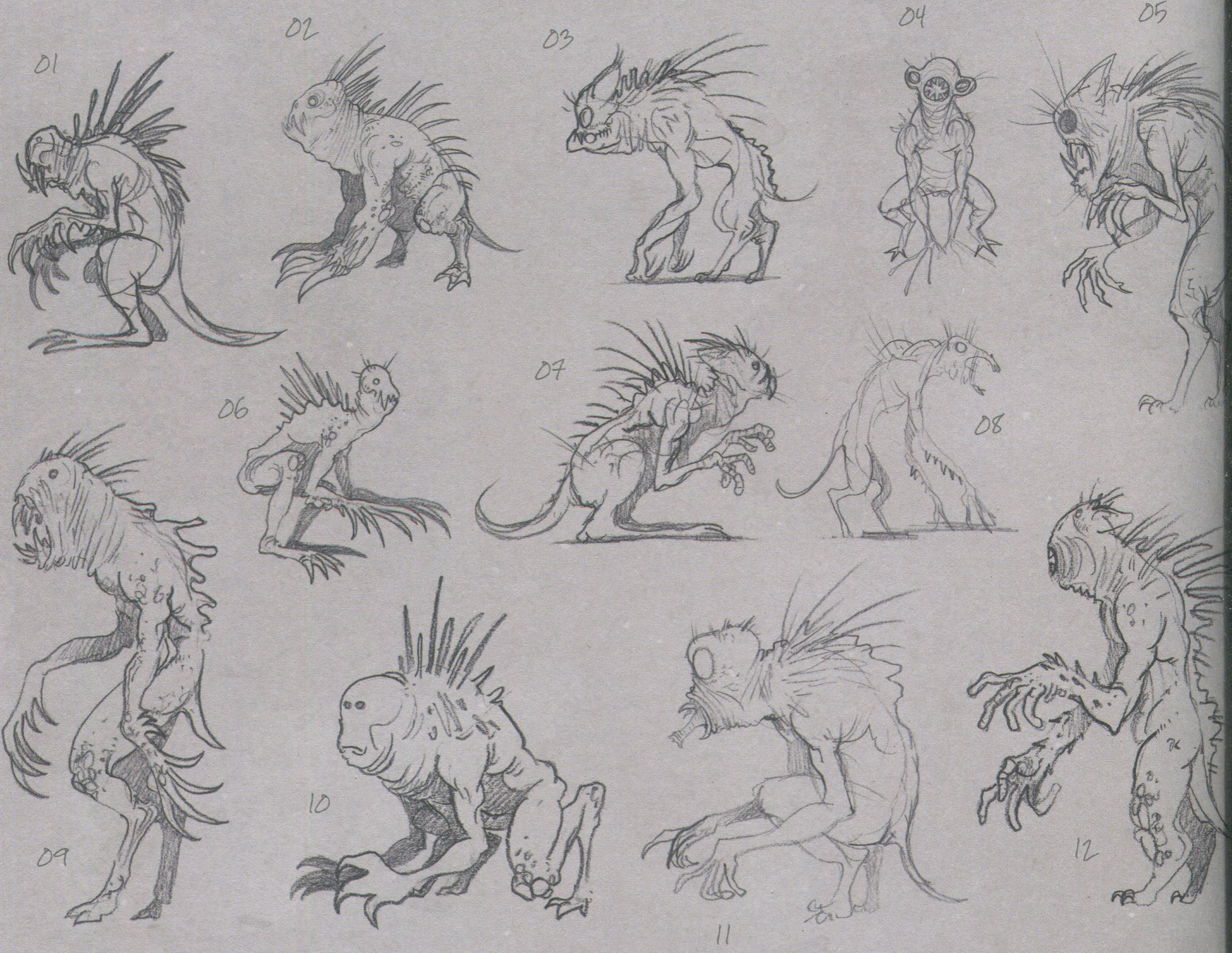
• DESIGN PROCESS •

Thumbnails

The thumbnails below show my explorations for the way this creature moves. Does the chupacabra walk upright on two legs, or does it use all four limbs? I decided that this creature can stand upright, but uses all four legs when hunting. It uses its hind legs for jumping.

Some of these thumbnails have a lot of sharp elements (big claws and quills) conveying the terrifying nature of the creature. I decided that the chupacabra uses its long fingers for grabbing, not for slashing, which could explain why only three puncture wounds are found on dead goats. The quills of the creature are key because, apart from the skin and eyes, they are one of the main descriptive elements of the chupacabra.

The pose of the creature is important, but at this stage I did not focus on that too much. The most important thing for me when working on early thumbnails is the overall feel of the desig trying to make all the elements work as a whol I like the thumbnails where the chupacabra proportions almost resemble those of a huma I find this a good design choice because it much creepier than the purely animalis ones, accomplishing the horrific and petrifyi feeling that I am aiming for.

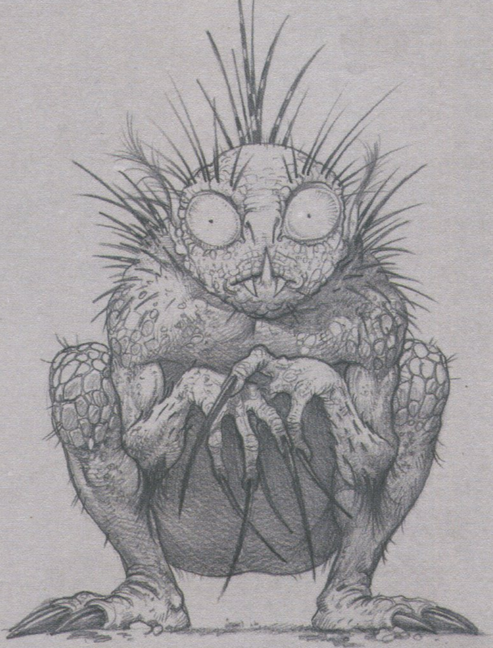


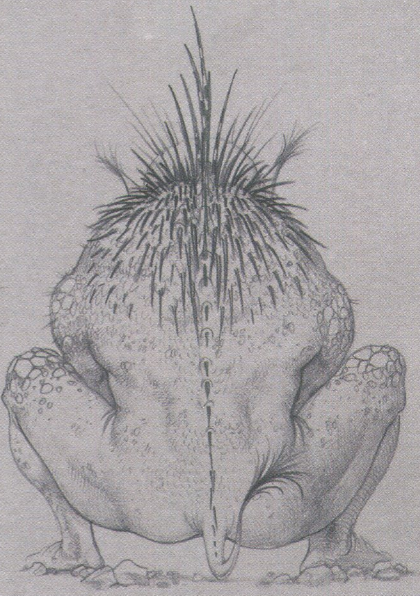
Further exploration

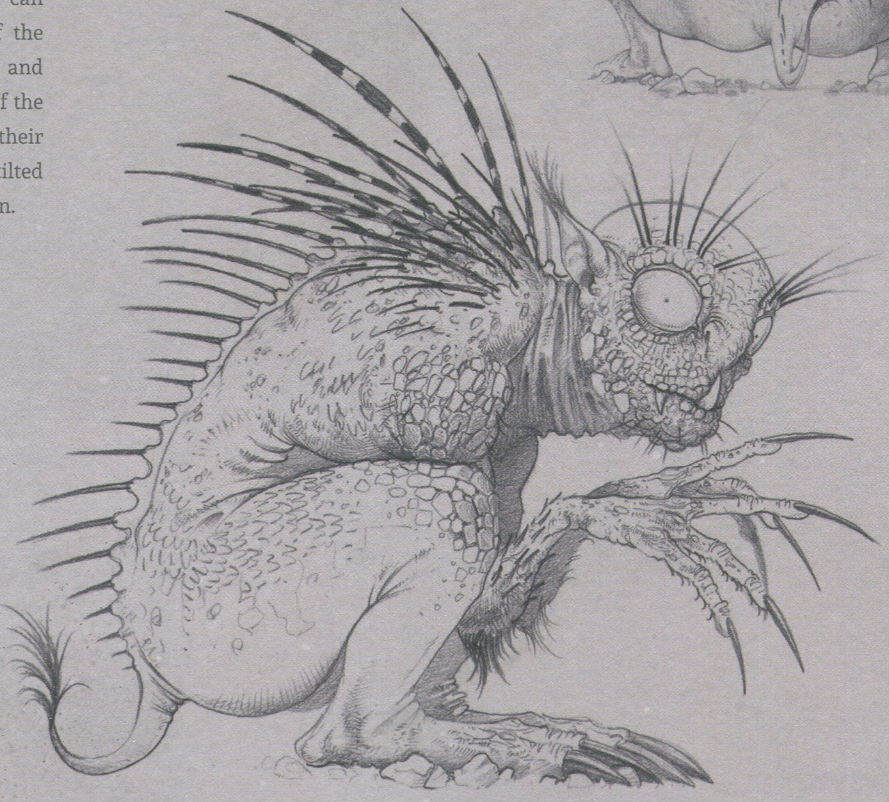
The front view of the design I chose to move forward with shows the chupacabra's face, with the big red eyes as a focal point of the pose. You can clearly see the proportion of the face and the characteristic roundness of the head. The chupacabra's gaze is directed at the viewer, and this amplifies the petrifying aspect of the creature. Its long fingers with sharp claws are very intimidating from this point of view, but the pose is missing a clear silhouette showing the quills along the back.

The rear view of the creature clearly demonstrates the strong muscles of the upper back, and you can see the characteristic line of quills going through the center of the back and ending with the short tail. You can appreciate the structure and different patterns of the back, looking like an expressive, abstract painting.

A side view is the best choice for presenting the chupacabra. All of the thumbnails were instinctively drawn in this view because the silhouette is clear and interesting. You can clearly see the peculiar curved back of the creature ornamented by sharp spines and quills. The hands are pushed to the side of the silhouette so you can easily appreciate their structure and details. The head is slightly tilted toward us, adding depth to the composition.

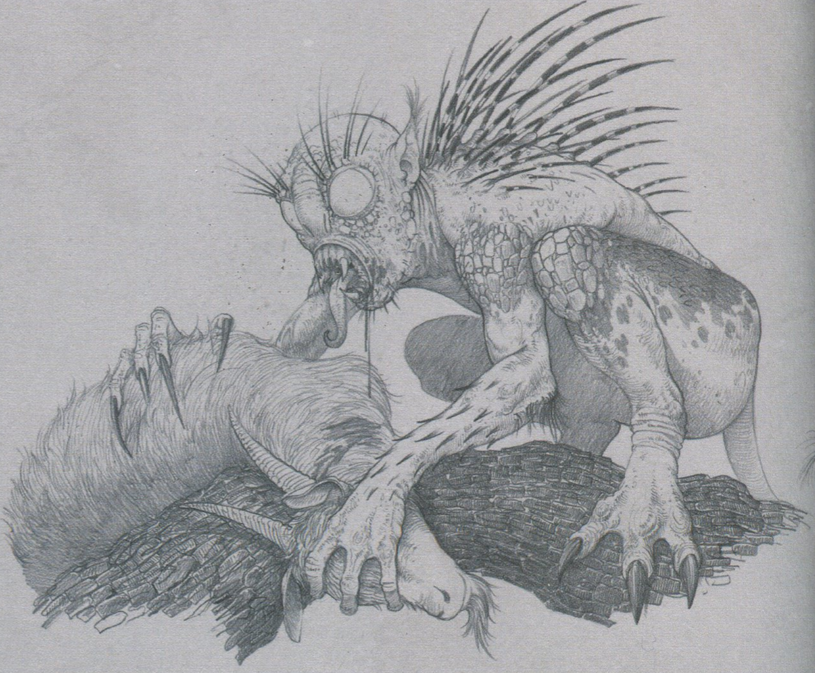




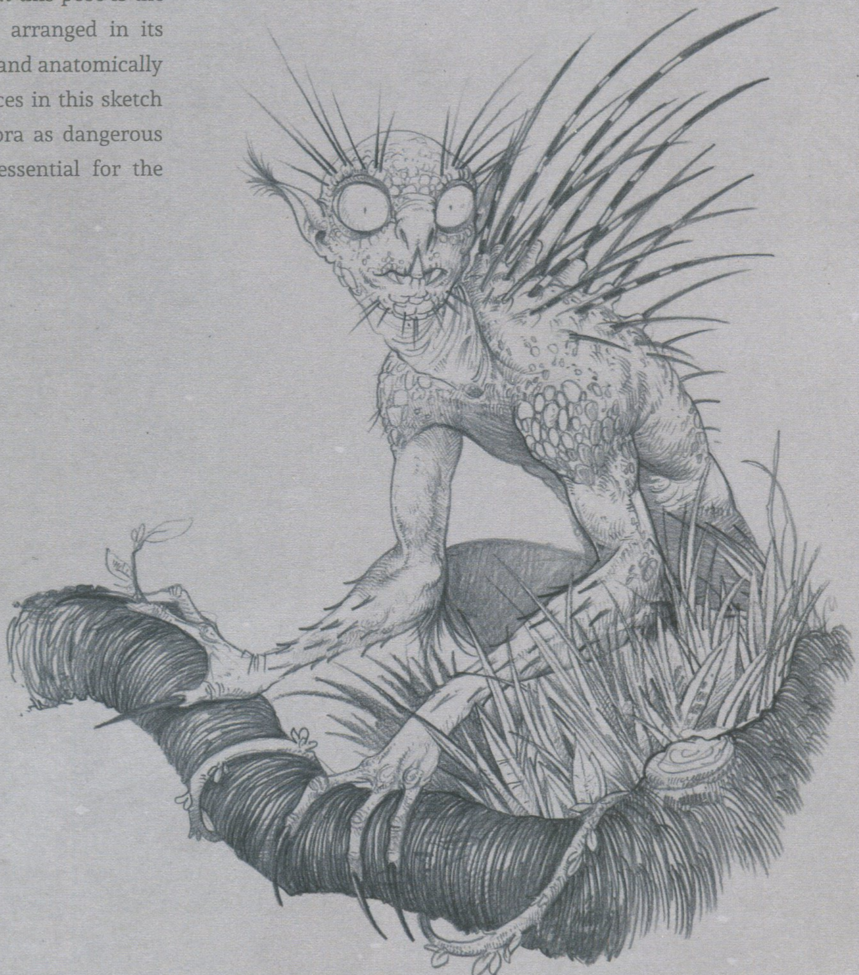


Poses

To make the chupacabra as terrifying as possible, I decided to show the monster at the moment when it is eating its prey, hunched forward so we can see its distinctive quills. This first drawing shows the creature holding and sucking the blood from the neck of a dead goat. I love the way the chupacabra covers the eyes of the animal with its hand. It looks like a brutal and aggressive thing to do, and that is something that fits the chupacabra's description. This pose uses an element of story to capture the nature and character of this creature.



This second drawing presents the chupacabra in a neutral pose. *I tried to show it standing* upright, more like a human. However, the pose and scene do not accentuate the frightening and creepy side of this phantom predator. One thing that I do like about this pose is the face: the way the teeth are arranged in its closed mouth seems realistic and anatomically correct. But my general choices in this sketch do not portray the chupacabra as dangerous and bloodthirsty, which is essential for the success of this design.



• SUBSPECIES •

Flying chupacabra

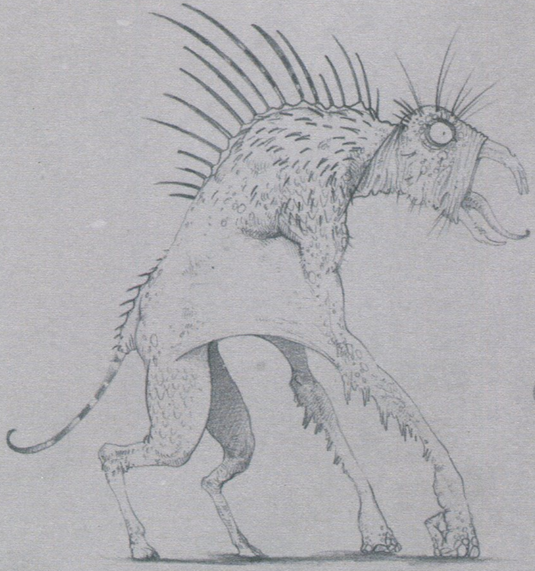
Some sightings indicate that the chupacabra has wings so it can fly. Flying chupacabras glide silently through the air like owls do when hunting prey. The flying chupacabra is small, growing up to two or three feet in height. It has a long tongue, long sharp teeth, and skin appendages on the sides of its body, similar to those of flying squirrels. It has small hooks on its forearms for a stronger grip on its prey. When on the ground, it uses all four legs to move around.

Mega chupacabra

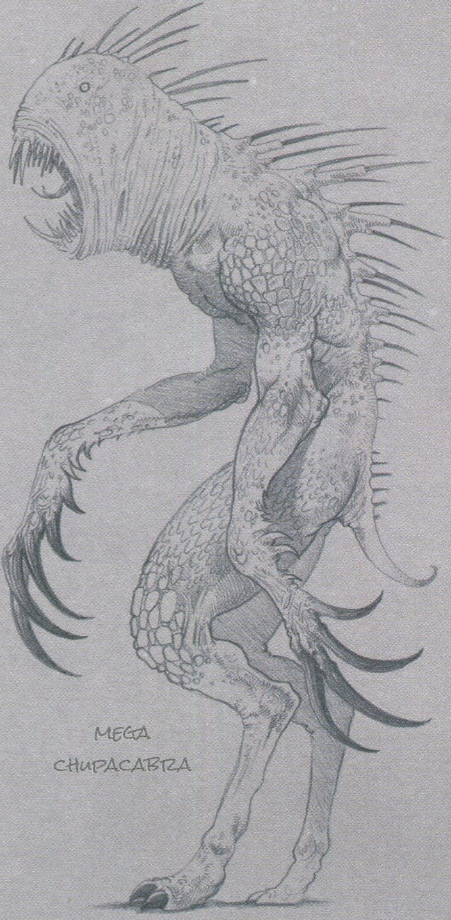
Here we have a type of chupacabra that grows over eight feet in height and is known as the "mega chupacabra." It has extremely long hands with protracted claws that can inflict horrific damage to its prey. This type of chupacabra is muscular and strong, so it is able to hunt larger animals like cows, horses, and deer. Though a typical chupacabra avoids humans, this subspecies does not hesitate to attack settlements and try to catch small children. It lives deep inside caves and is absolutely blind, using its acute sense of smell to find its way around.

Forest chupacabra

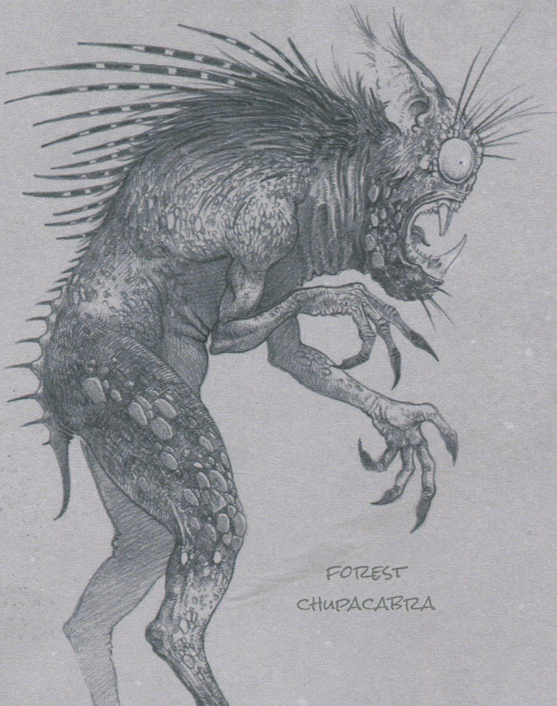
This creature lives deep in the forest and comes to human settlements just to feed on livestock. It has long ears, big red eyes, dark scaly skin, and short hands with long fingers ending with small but very sharp claws. It walks upright, making it four feet tall, and moves with precision and speed. Its hind legs are very strong; it usually hunts by jumping aggressively on its prey.



FLYING CHUPACABRA



MEGA CHUPACABRA

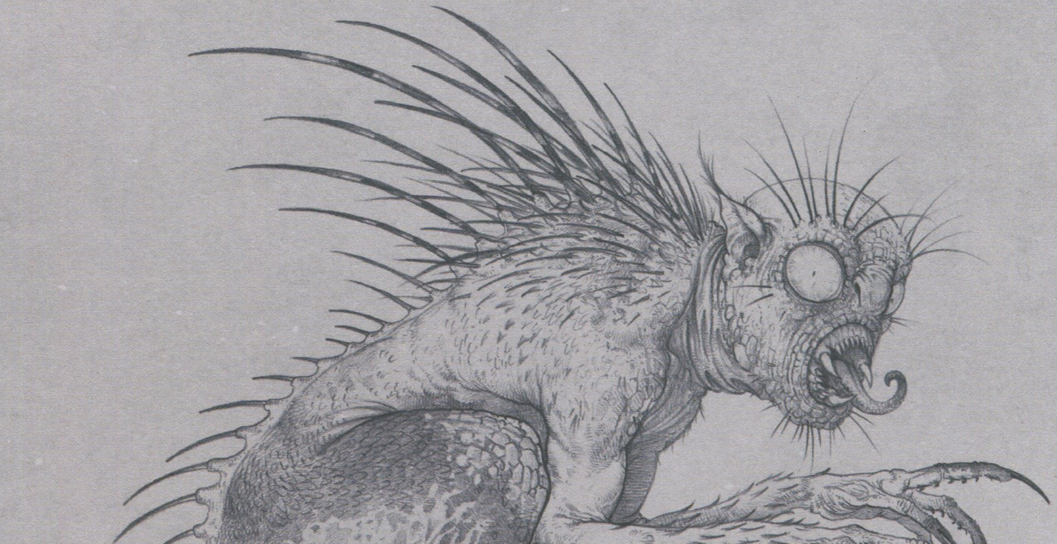


FOREST CHUPACABRA

• FINAL DESIGN •

My main objective for the final design was to capture the overall horrific nature of this creature. The pose that I chose illustrates the creature with great potential to inflict harm on its prey. Looking at the anatomy of its body and hind legs, we can conclude that it is a very agile creature that is able to make long jumps. Its hands are human-like, with opposable thumbs, which give it an evolutionary advantage over other animals and helps the chupacabra to manipulate its prey with ease. I chose to show its mouth open to display its predatory teeth and disgusting tongue.

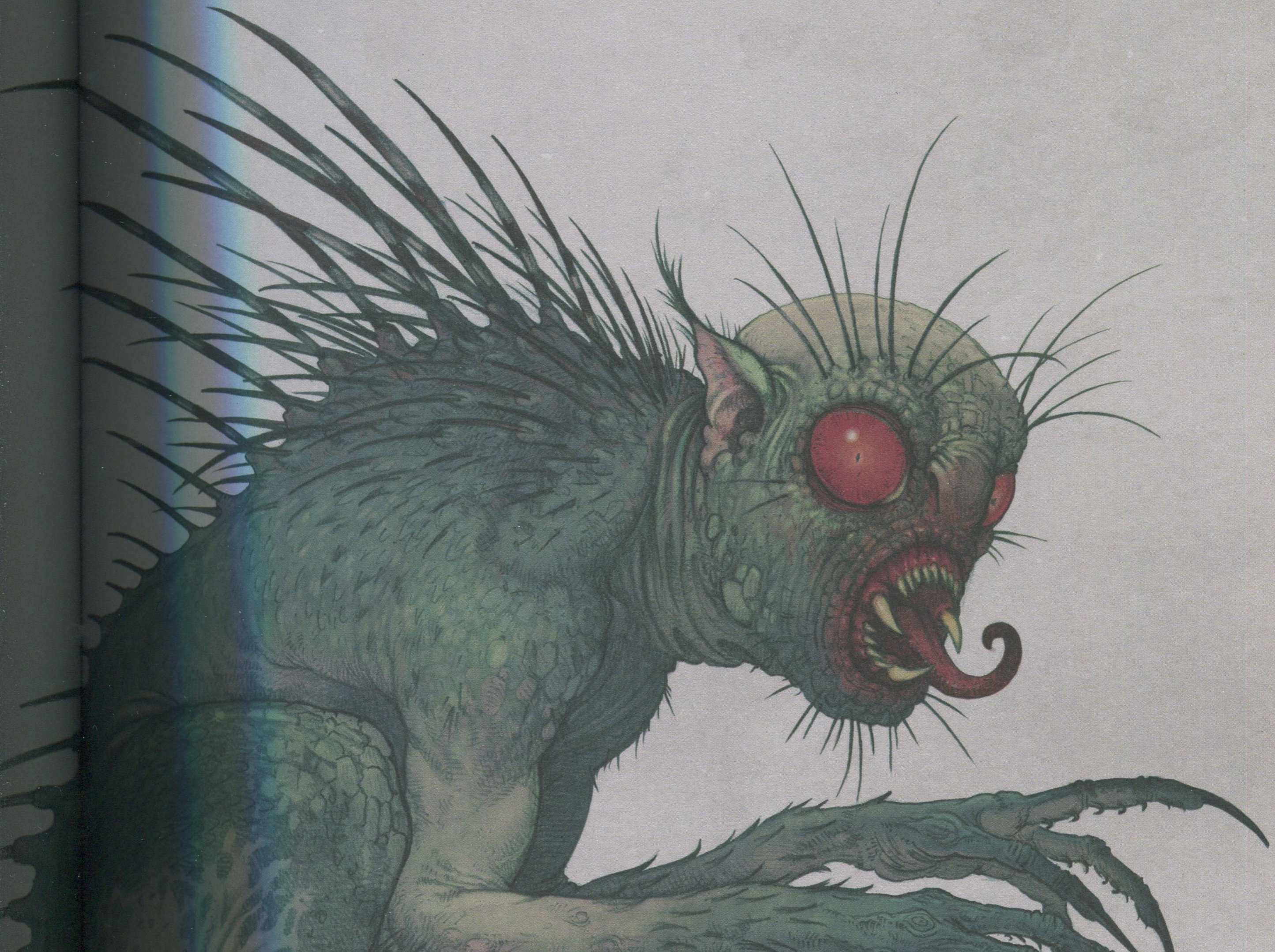
The big, red eyes are an element mentioned constantly in alleged encounters and testimonials, so I made them a prominent part of the chupacabra's face. They contrast well with the green, reptilian skin. Its highly saturated eyes and piercing gaze ignite fear in those who can imagine meeting this creature in the dark.

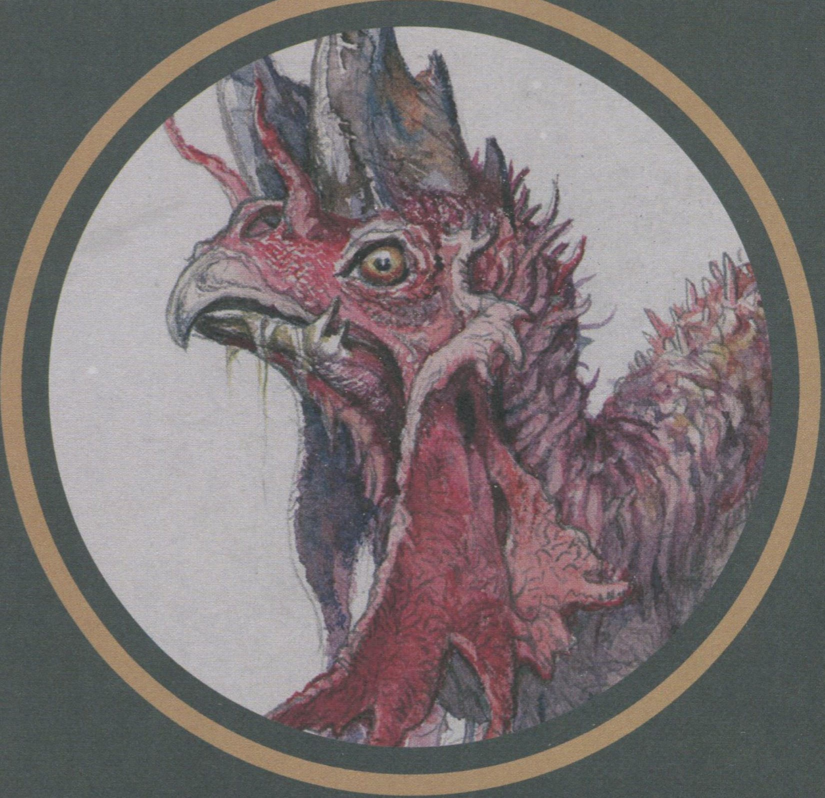


Key facts

Name: Chupacabra
Taxonomy: Unknown, possibly reptilian/primate
Region: Puerto Rico
Habitat: Semi-arid grassland
Mythical abilities: Bloodsucker
Threat to humans: 2

Final image © Edin Durmisevic





• COCKATRICE •

The cockatrice is a fearsome creature often described as a serpent bearing the head and body of a cockerel, and the wings of a dragon. They
grow larger than a well-fed rooster and tend to lead solitary lives due to their violent and territorial nature. The first cockatrice is beli
have hatched from a chicken egg incubated by a toad or snake, and populations have migrated from the deserts of northern Africa int
of mainland Europe. These animals spread pestilence and disease wherever they roam, and vegetation is known to wither in their wak
rancid breath is toxic to any who come too close, and their poisonous saliva pollutes any spring or stream from which they drink. Legen
that any who look directly into the eyes of a cockatrice will be turned into stone. To avoid this fate, most people who hunt them do so while
uncomfortably over their shoulder into the reflection of a mirror. Aside from humans, the weasel is the only known predator of the coc
though it will often die locked in a struggle with the deadly serpent.

• JORDAN K. WALKER •

Illustrator • jordankwalkerart.com

LD NOTES •

chickens

ken breeds of the world are marvelous in their diversity, and provide ence for any potential cockatrice design. Note the pair of strange growths found in some European breeds, lobe-like wattles that hang f the beak, and a crest of thin, curling feathers atop the head. Features help to make an interesting silhouette. The presence of pendulous, s on a creature can also add visual weight and movement while nse of unease.

nd Red roosters

Red roosters have some of the most impressive combs of any breed. st atop the rooster's head is wrinkled, leathery, and pumped full of or. It has a striking, spiny-looking silhouette that seems potentially e rooster uses its comb to attract females, as well as to threaten and males. When the threatening comb is not enough, they can fight with their ankles. *I like the adversarial properties of this comb both in* avior, and will integrate something similar into my cockatrice design.

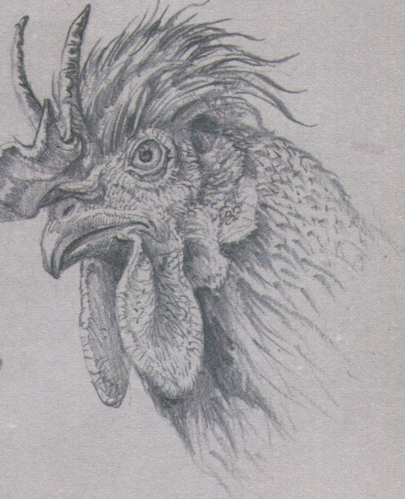
es

e large flightless birds native to Australia. The primary function of casque is display, but they sometimes use them to head-butt their ften with devastating effect. Older cassowaries often have gnarly cars running along their casques – indicators of past battles won. his will help convey the violent nature of my cockatrice, and add interest to the design. The wrinkled neck of the cassowary brings iations with vultures and other animals that feed on carrion as a ht.

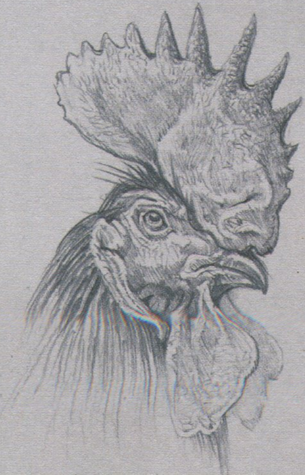
es

e commonly described in bestiaries as "serpents," and among the f serpents are the vine snakes native to the rainforests of Southeast arboreal hunters of extreme dexterity, with particularly thin ribbon- ey can twist themselves into amazing patterns, and have prominent gs running along their scales. I like to imagine that a cockatrice might to sight by twisting its tail in mesmerizing patterns, drawing them toxic bite.

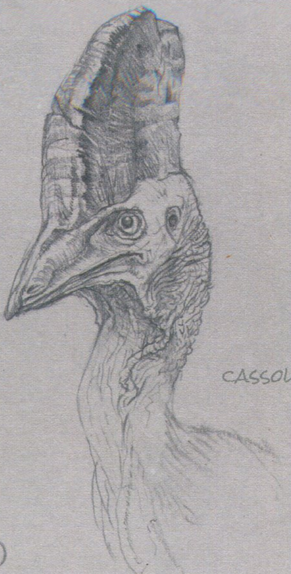
e many modern animals that can inspire the design of a cockatrice, st similar to the legendary beast actually lived millions of years ago. a small theropod dinosaur that flourished between the middle and riod. It had a feathered bird-like body, but also membranous wings a dragon. The bizarre, partially feathered structure of these wings is g seen in any other modern or extinct lineage. This basic body plan orm the appearance of my cockatrice.



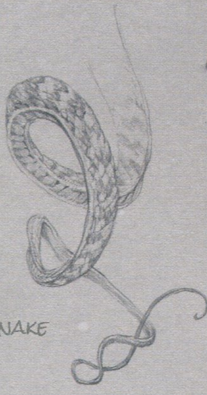
EUROPEAN CHICKEN BREED



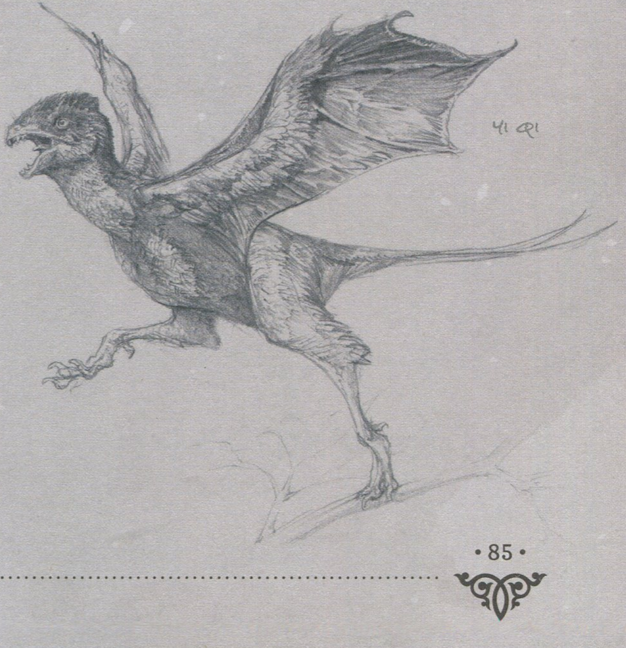
RHODE ISLAND RED ROOSTER



CASSOWARY



VINE SNAKE



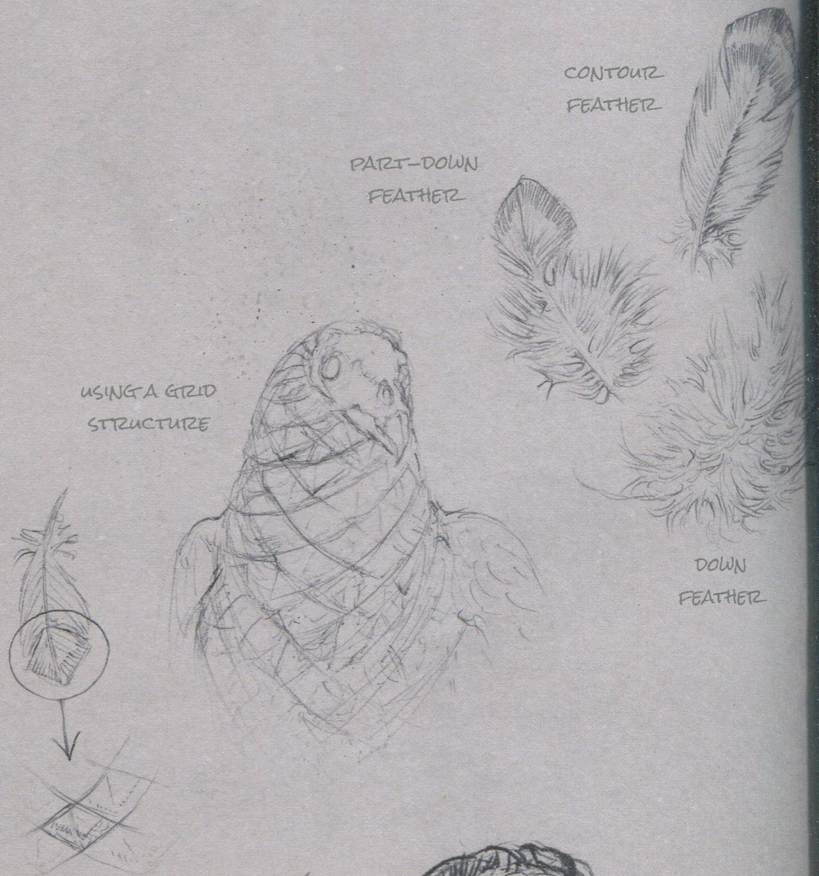
YI QI

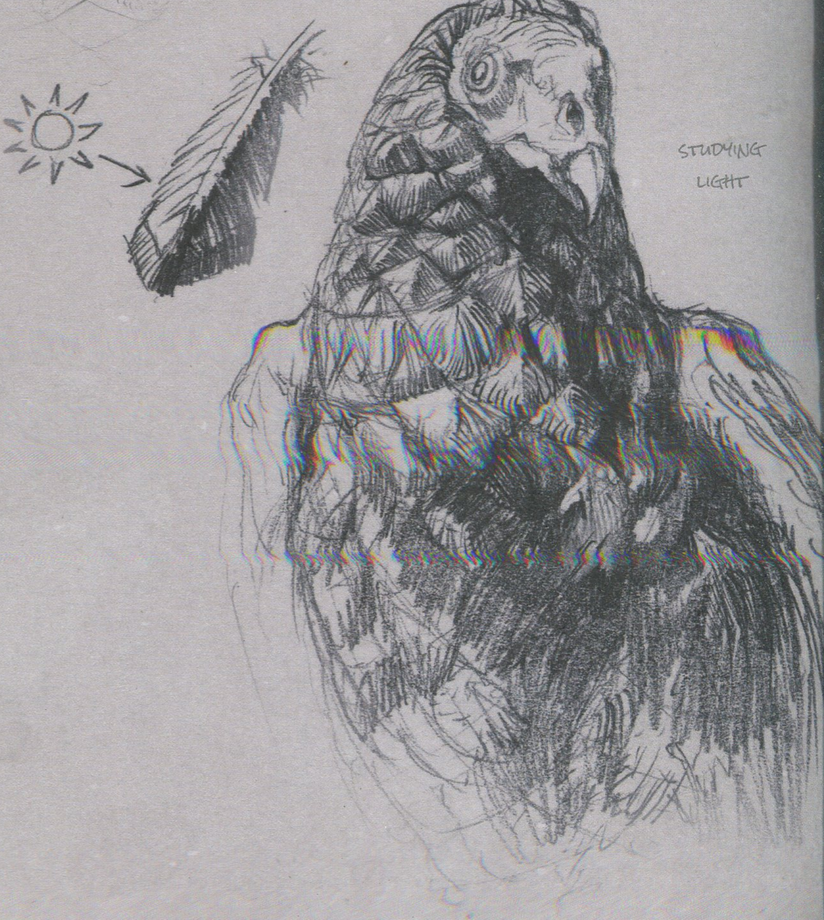
Feathers

People often associate feathers with flight, but there are many feather types which have nothing to do with flight. Down feathers are the fluffiest, and while a layer of down provides insulation across the body, they are usually only exposed when stiffer outer feathers are ruffled. In some cases, a feather with a base of down filaments ends in a stiffer segment so the feather can serve multiple functions. Contour feathers form the outer layer of protection on a bird. This is the type that you should be most concerned about when describing a form with feathers.

When studying anatomical features, it can be helpful to make trips to local zoos, aquariums, raptor centers, or similar facilities to draw from life. This is where it is easiest to observe the way these features wrap around the three-dimensional form of an animal. When drawing a layer of feathers across a body, I sometimes find it useful to create a grid of intersecting lines that follows the contours of the form in the same way feathers would. Each stretched "square" of the grid represents the tip of a feather overlapping the feathers below, and being overlapped by the feathers above.

When rendering contour feathers, it is important to remember that they are three-dimensional objects affected by light. The vane divides a feather in two, and the filaments on the side of the vane closest to the light source will be illuminated. The other side will be cast in shadow. I apply this principle to the feather tips in the grid structure described above. I try to avoid rendering every single feather; large shadow masses across a form like the chest of this vulture can be rendered with a solid value to bring clarity to the overall image and provide the eye with resting space.



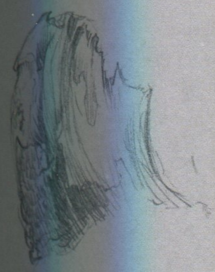


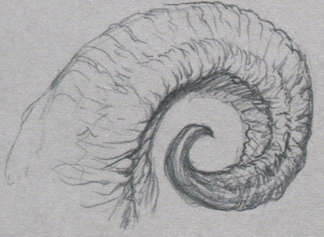
Ridged horns

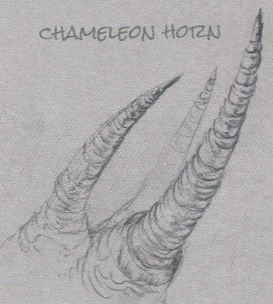
Horns are impressive features for display and battle that occur across different animal kingdoms. Mammal horns such as ram horns are built from specialized hair follicles. These are used for battering, and therefore are heavily ridged. They often spiral in angular patterns. Horns found on reptiles, like chameleon horns, are modified scales. They are used for grappling, and are much less stocky. The casques of birds such as cassowaries are made from a core of bone, with a thin leathery coating on the outside. This outer coating can be worn significantly by aging and combat.

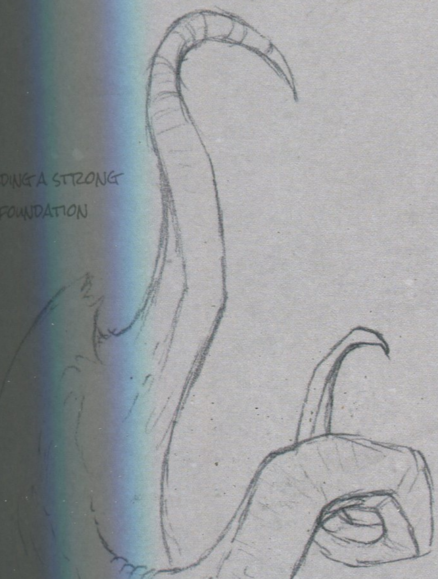
All these different horns are made from the same basic building block: a protein called keratin. You can combine attributes of all of them to create designs that are functional and visually interesting. I use broad casque-like forms to create a strong foundation that can bear the brunt of an impact. Behind this base, I integrate angular spirals similar to ram horns, and these can taper into thinner forms reminiscent of chameleon horns. These more delicate growths might serve as hooks that rivals lock together like antlers in contests, or they may be a decorative indication of health and vigor.

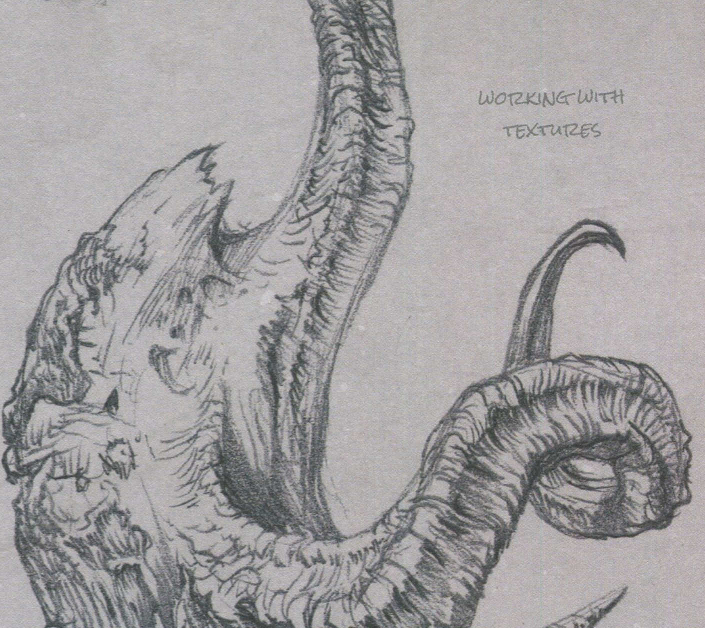
When rendering complex horns like this, the key is to integrate each different element in a naturalistic way by allowing for gradual transitions from one texture to another. Notice the way that the delicate rings at the tip of the upper structure in the sketch below flow into pronounced ridges, and those into the smooth side of the casque-like base. I vary shapes and textures across the form, but limit this variation to three or four different options to maintain visual consistency across the design. I add cracks and wear to frequently used areas to imply the weathering of time and numerous battles won.











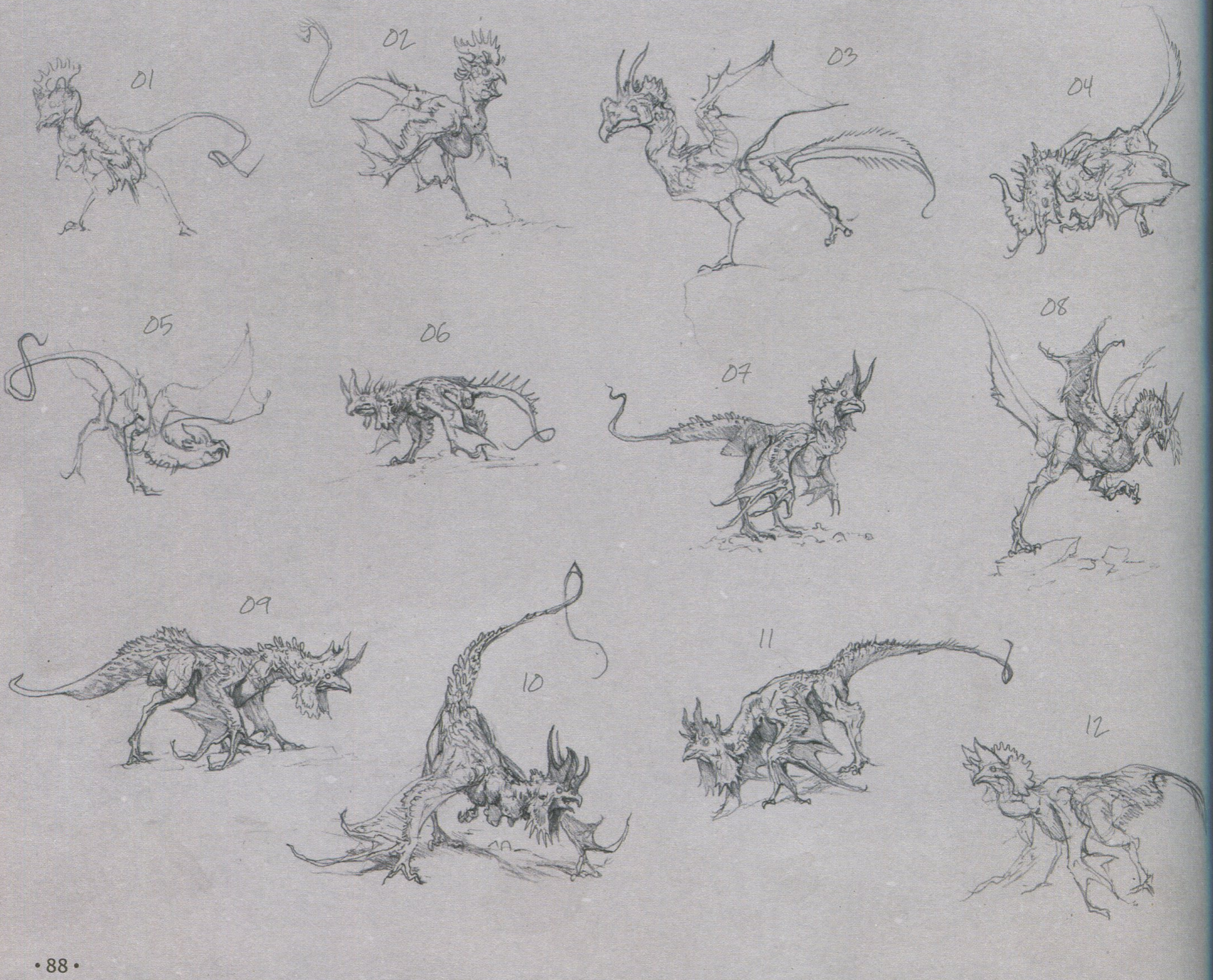
• DESIGN PROCESS •

Thumbnails

This series of thumbnails represents the first step in designing any creature. I do not want the cockatrice to be a mere combination of my research elements. Instead, I want it to seem like an animal with its own unique and naturalistic biology inspired by reference.

The first two thumbnails are usually the worst; they serve as an opportunity to get bad ideas out on paper so that better ones can come along later. In this case, thumbnails 01 to 04 are scrawny, unbalanced, and altogether too friendly in appearance. I like the swooping *Yi qi*-like wing in thumbnail 05, and carry this over to number 06. This sixth thumbnail is where some elements of the design started to click together. I want my cockatrice to appear menacing, and this low-profile stalking posture helps to convey that.

In thumbnails 07 and 08, I experimented with more agile-looking designs, and established a casque-like horn shape. While these designs look natural and interesting, they do not convey the cockatrice's role as a harbinger of disease and destruction. In thumbnails 09 to 12, I introduced the idea that the cockatrice can use its wing-like forelimbs to support more weight in the front of its body and crawl around in an unsettling way. Thumbnail 10 suggests a threat display, and I like the use of the long mesmerizing tail. It is here that I experimented with variations in wattles, wrinkles, spines, and poison sacs drooping from the creature's neck to create a design that is dangerous and disturbing.

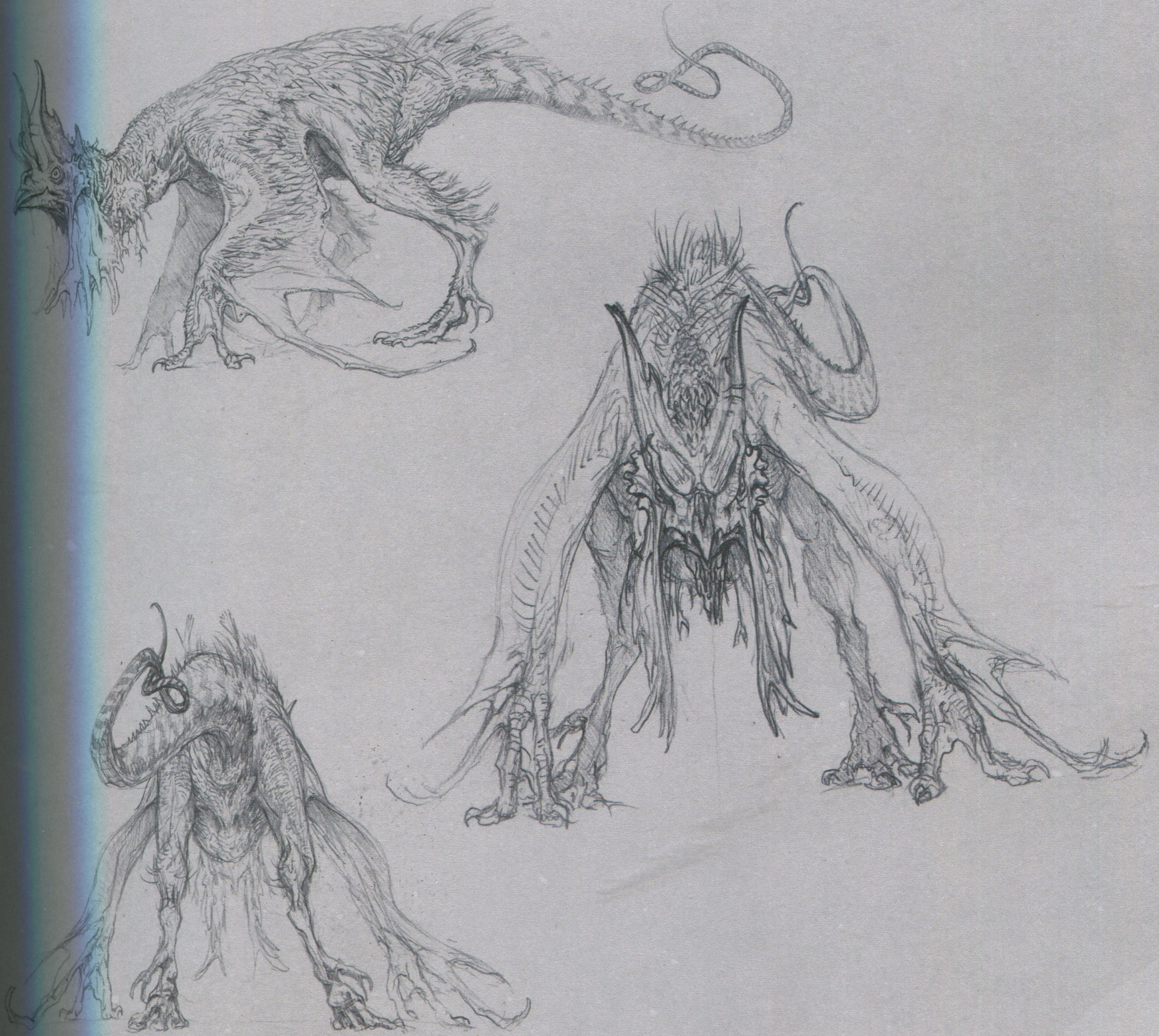


Further exploration

Thumbnail 11 ended up being the most influential in determining a final design. From the side, this cockatrice looks aggressive and deadly, poised to strike with a noxious bite. The mass of wattles and poison sacs that droop from its bare neck are disturbing, and its horns create a striking silhouette. The forelimb-wings are bizarrely delicate, which complements the contorted whip-like tail.

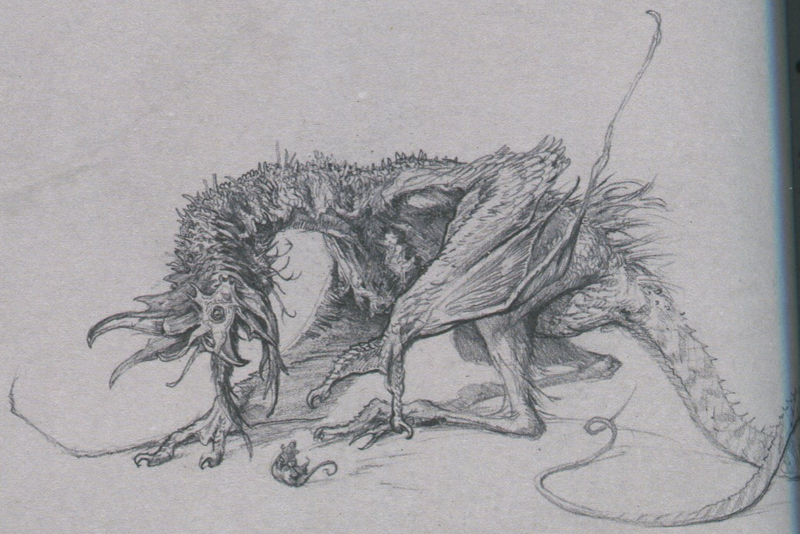
From the front, the shape of the horns creates an angry-looking brow structure, and draws the viewer's gaze to the eyes of the cockatrice. Though this is the angle we associate with a stare in predatory animals with forward-facing eyes, the eyes of the cockatrice face outward. This suggests that the cockatrice's infamous stare of death is not aimed at prey, but at potential predators like weasels and humans.

From behind, you can see the creature's stocky thighs and hind limbs, which bear most of its weight. The twisted pattern of the dexterous tail is also highlighted, providing the cockatrice with a dynamic element to offset its relatively ridged torso structure. The feet seem somewhat weak and unstructured in this iteration, and will be improved in the final design.

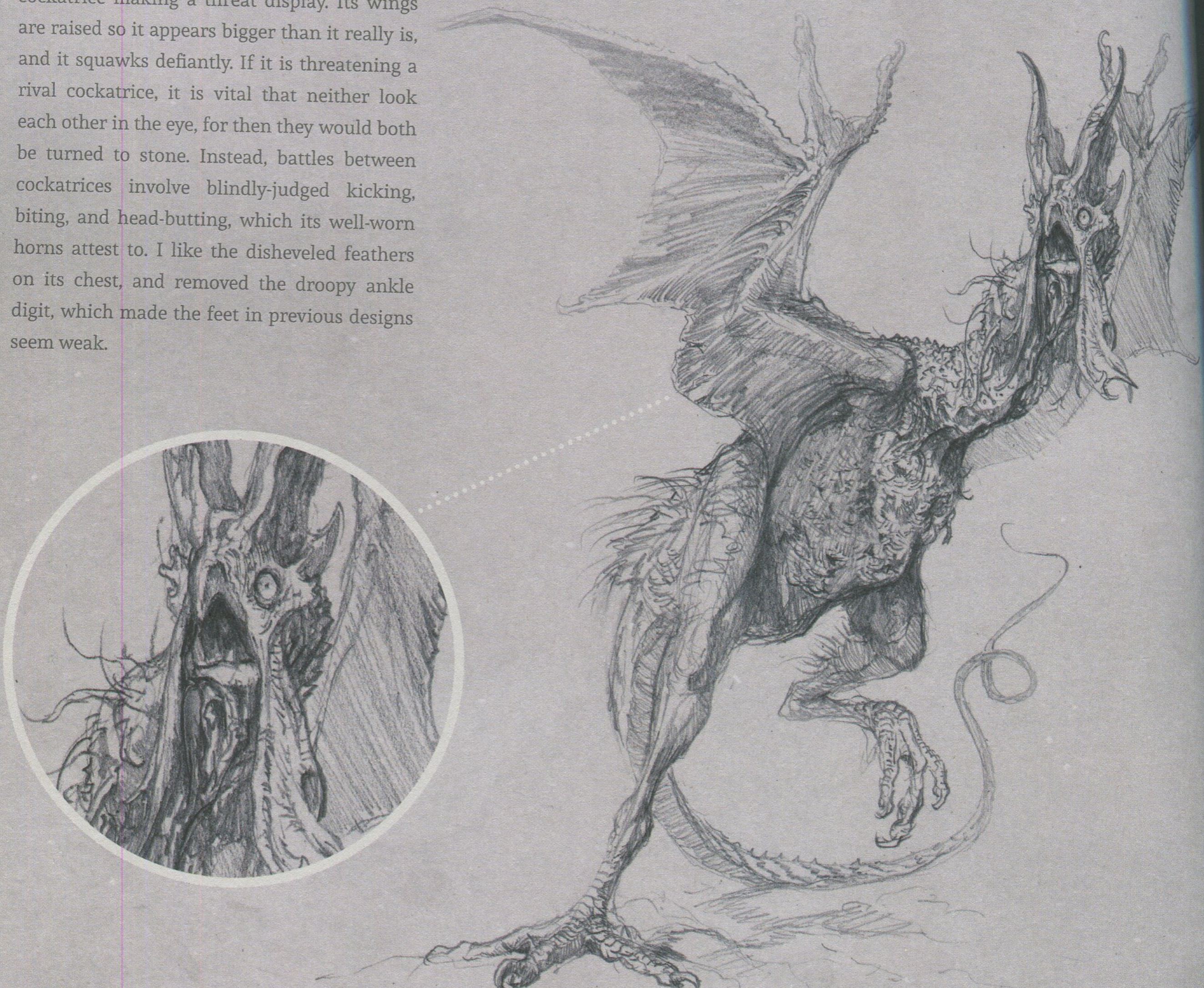


Poses

This first sketch shows a cockatrice that has accidentally locked eyes with its prey, and turned it into stone. Unable to eat the petrified mouse, the cockatrice paws at it in frustration. I like the idea that this deadly power meant to neutralize predators can often cause unwanted difficulties for the creature. I enjoy the curve of the tail in this pose, which looks as though it is uncurling from a mesmerizing pattern it was using to lure in the mouse before the accident. I experimented with adding more fleshy tendrils to make the silhouette of the neck more interesting.



This second drawing shows an angry cockatrice making a threat display. Its wings are raised so it appears bigger than it really is, and it squawks defiantly. If it is threatening a rival cockatrice, it is vital that neither look each other in the eye, for then they would both be turned to stone. Instead, battles between cockatrices involve blindly-judged kicking, biting, and head-butting, which its well-worn horns attest to. I like the disheveled feathers on its chest, and removed the droopy ankle digit, which made the feet in previous designs seem weak.



• SUBSPECIES •

Saharan cockatrice

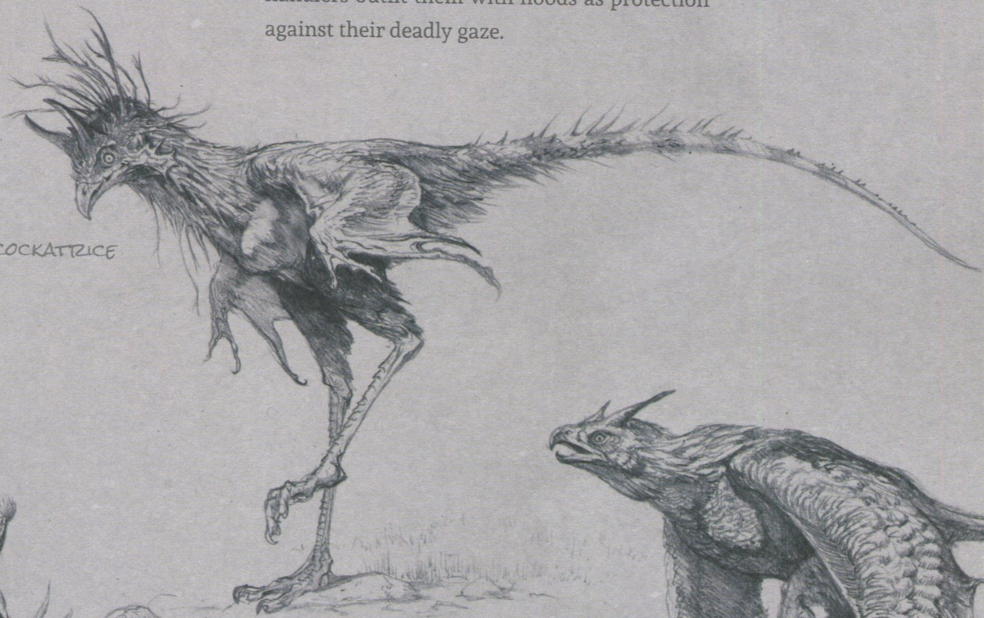
The earliest known populations of cockatrice originated in the deserts of northern Africa, and this subspecies is one of their descendants. It is a predator adapted for speed, with long, powerful legs and a ridged tail to provide balance while chasing prey across vast dunes and scrublands. Its wings are underdeveloped, and used mainly for display and balance. Like its distant cousin, the secretary bird, the Saharan cockatrice is known to trample and eat serpents and other prey it doesn't first turn to stone.

Domestic cockatrice

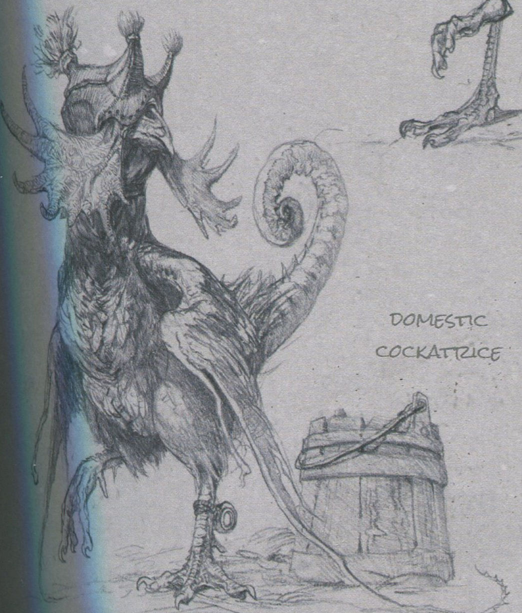
In a landscape more lush and full of prey than the Sahara, European cockatrices can afford to be more ponderous than their African kin. Cockatrices kept by humans however, take this to another extreme. These domesticated variants have been selectively bred for centuries, and often take on forms that would not serve them well in the wild. Decorative plumage, trailing wings, and ungainly antler-like wattles are features prized by breeders. The breeding and keeping of cockatrices comes with obvious dangers, however, and their handlers outfit them with hoods as protection against their deadly gaze.

Avian cockatrice

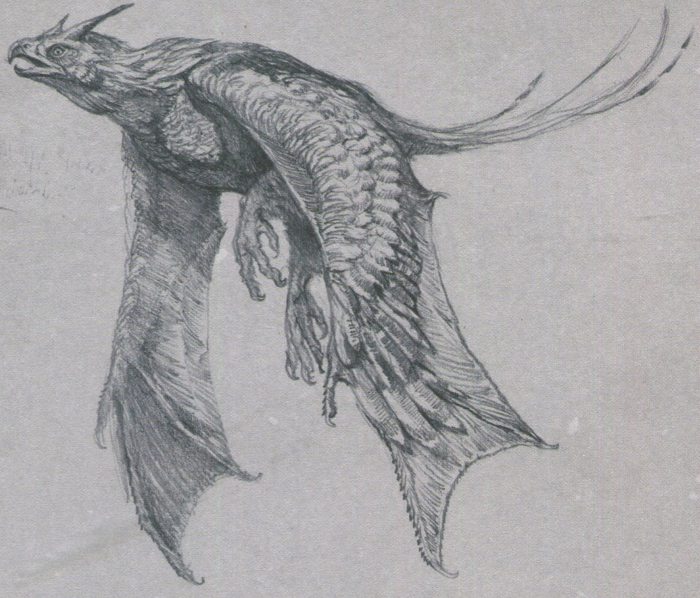
In some regions of the world, cockatrices have developed sturdier wing structures and taken to the air. These variants resemble eagles and other raptors, with an array of primary and secondary flight feathers complementing their strong wing membranes. Their tail and horns are reduced to allow for a more aerodynamic profile, and their talon-like feet snatch prey from above. Though successful as aerial predators, they lack the venomous qualities other cockatrices are famous for.



SAHARAN COCKATRICE



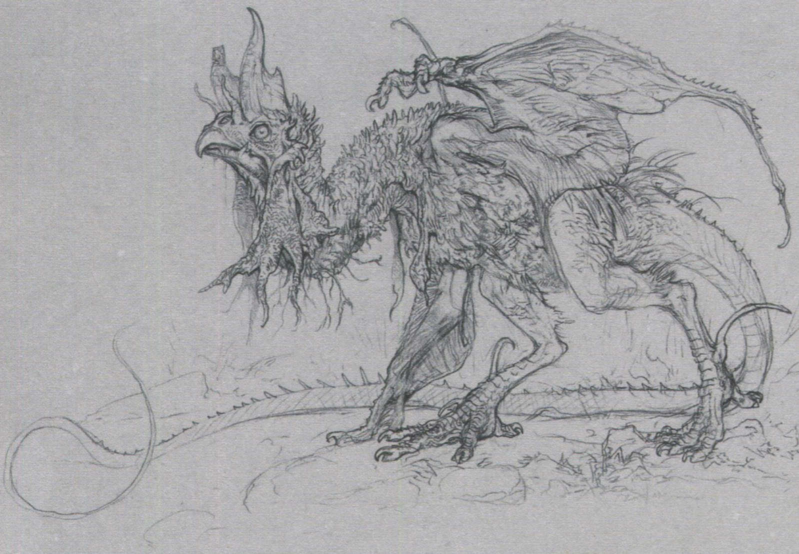
DOMESTIC COCKATRICE

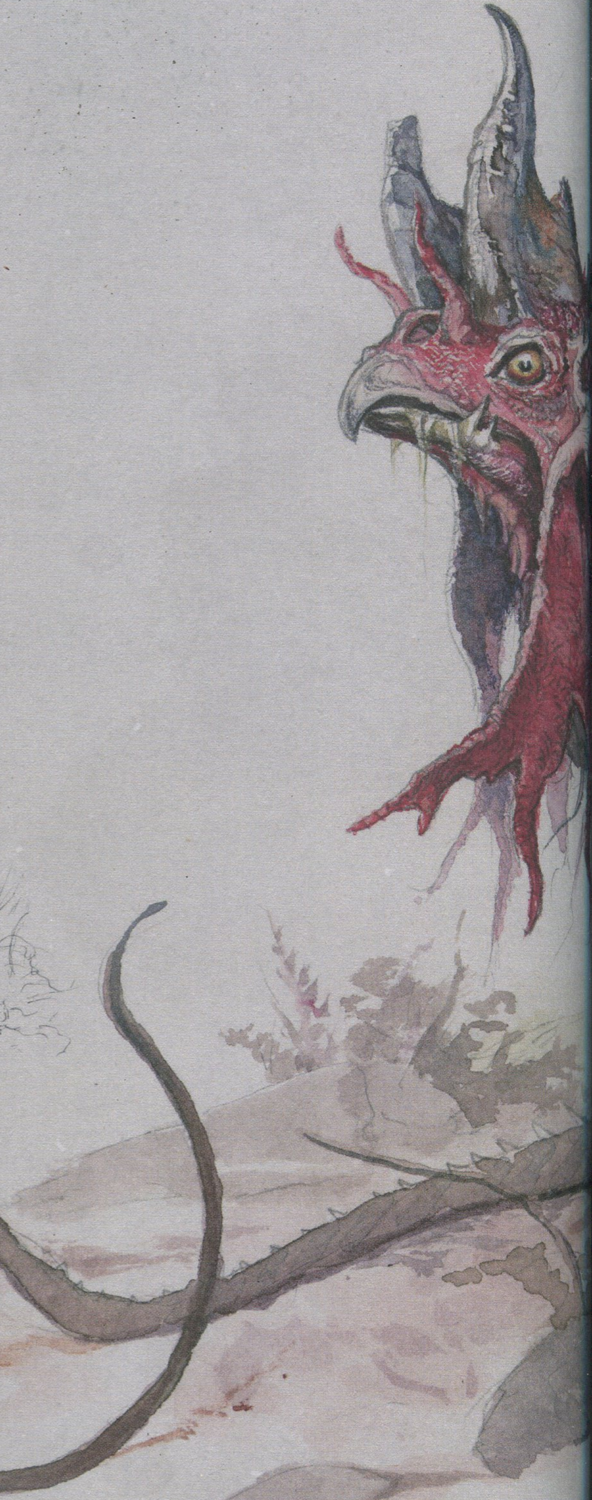


AVIAN COCKATRICE

• FINAL DESIGN •

My final design for the cockatrice melds the most interesting elements of my research in order to create a unique animal authentic to legendary accounts. Its body is reminiscent of a rooster, and the raw, fleshy texture of its wattled neck carries associations with decay and disease. Strands of venom drip from its raggedly toothed beak, and the vegetation it stands upon withers in the fumes of its noxious breath. One of its draconic forelimbs is raised in aggression, and its broken horns allude to an aggressive lifestyle. Its serpentine tail flicks ominously, and its scaly, spurred feet are poised for action. This is a sluggish creature that prefers to rely on its mesmerizing tail to lure prey, or its toxicity and petrifying abilities to deal with predators. When these methods fail, however, it can lash out with unrestrained physical violence.

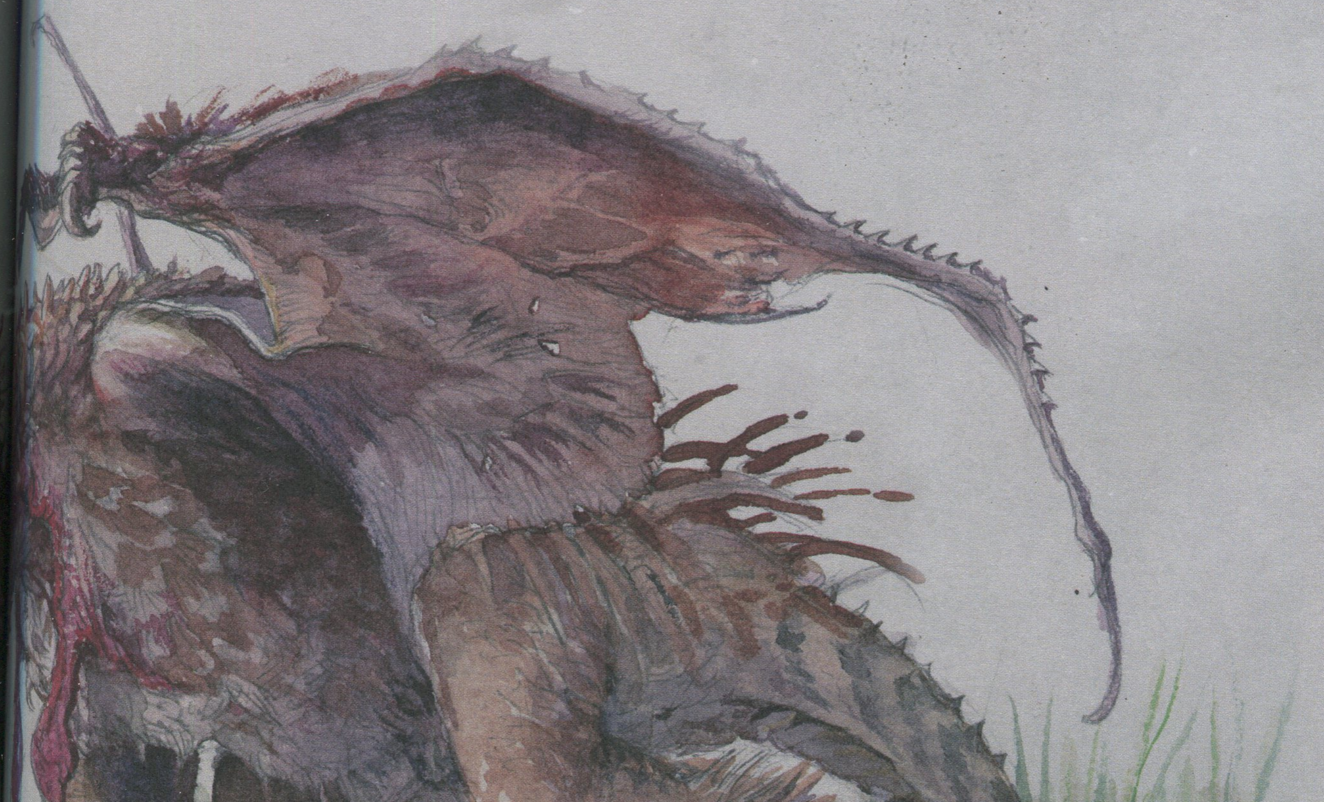




Key facts

Name: Cockatrice
Taxonomy: Cockerel, dragon, snake
Region: Europe
Habitat: Various
Mythical abilities: Petrifaction, toxic breath
Threat to humans: 5

Final image © Jordan K. Walker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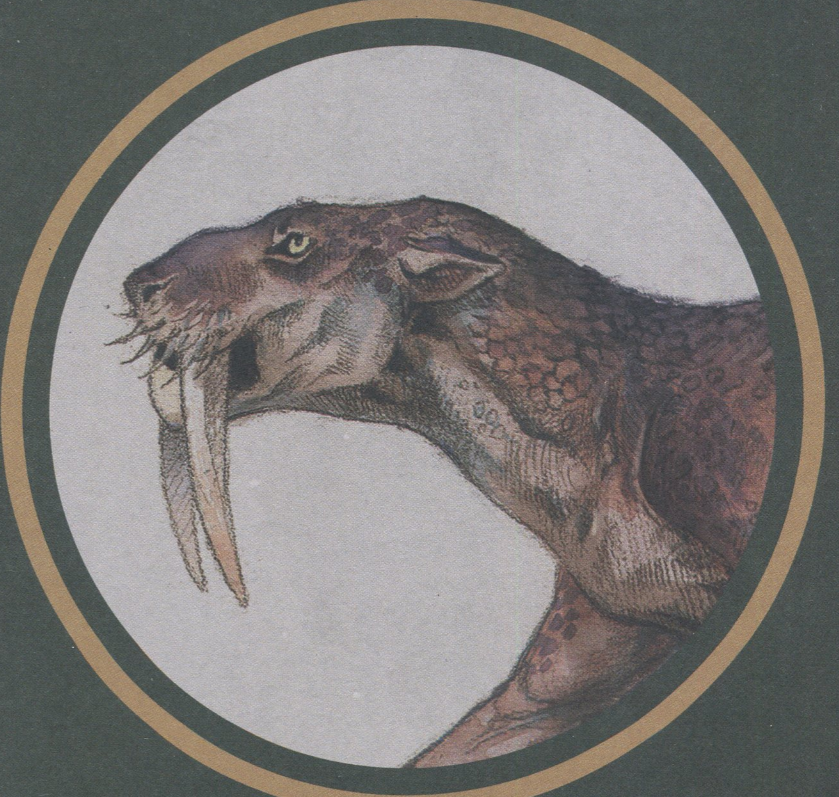


• DINGONEK •

The dingonek is a West African mythical creature with quite a distinctive appearance. It has been described as a hippopotamus-sized
residing mainly in rivers and ponds. It is covered in scales, not unlike those of a pangolin, and is said to be gray or red in color. Some desc
as also having a spotted back, a lot like a leopard. The dingonek has a long, thin tail that ends in some form of sting that secretes deadly ve
fierce predator, its most recognizable feature is probably its threatening saber teeth. For that reason, the dingonek is sometimes described
"jungle walrus."

• ANNA PODEDWORNA •

Concept artist • akreon.artstation.com

• FIELD NOTES •

Walrus

I decided to begin my research as the nickname of the creature would suggest – by examining a walrus. The most prominent feature of the walrus is its long, ivory tusks. They are used mainly as a defensive weapon and as tools (for example for foraging for food and to help haul itself up onto land or ice). I imagine the dingonek to be a predator so I continue my research with teeth suitable for that purpose.

Smilodon

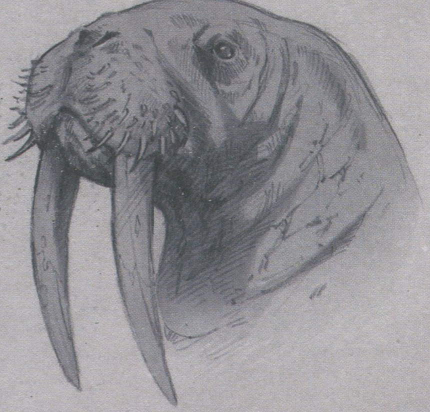
There are many modern predators that can boast an impressive set of teeth, but none of them quite compete with the long-extinct smilodon. Also known as the saber-toothed tiger, the smilodon is one of the most famous prehistoric mammals. More robustly built than any of its modern cousins, its head structure is a great starting point. The canines of a smilodon are more slender than a walrus's, and their fine serrations on the front and back give the creature a slick and intimidating look I would like to bring to the dingonek design.

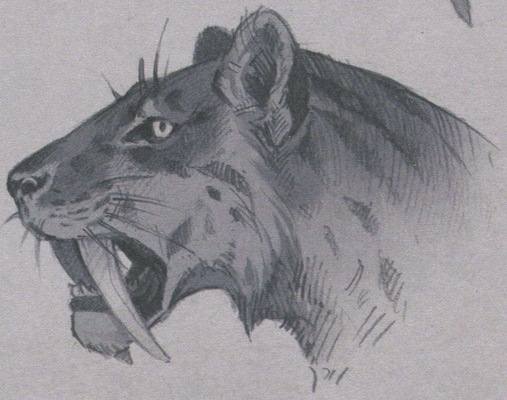
Gorgonopsids

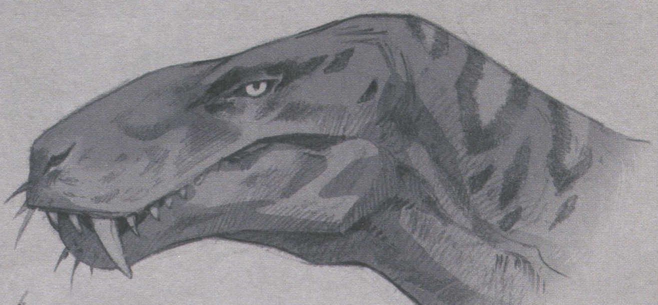
Many parts of the dingonek's description, such as its scaly appearance and reptilian claws, suggest that it may not belong to the mammal family tree. For that reason I decide to leave the walrus in the Holocene and the smilodon in the Pleistocene and travel further back in search for inspiration. My next research subject is a gorgonopsid – an animal predating both mammals and reptiles. Gorgonopsids were apex predators of the Late Permian. Boasting massive jaws and canines, they make a great template for the dingonek's design.

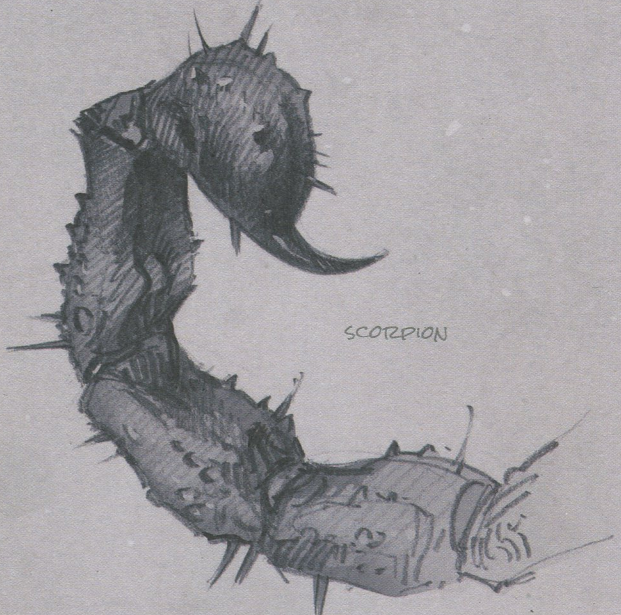
Scorpion

Another component of the creature I need to tackle is its tail. The dingonek's tail is supposed to be long and end in a venomous appendage. What immediately comes to mind is of course a scorpion's tail. A scorpion's tail is usually segmented and carried in a forward curve over the arachnid's back. The tail ends in a venomous stinger.







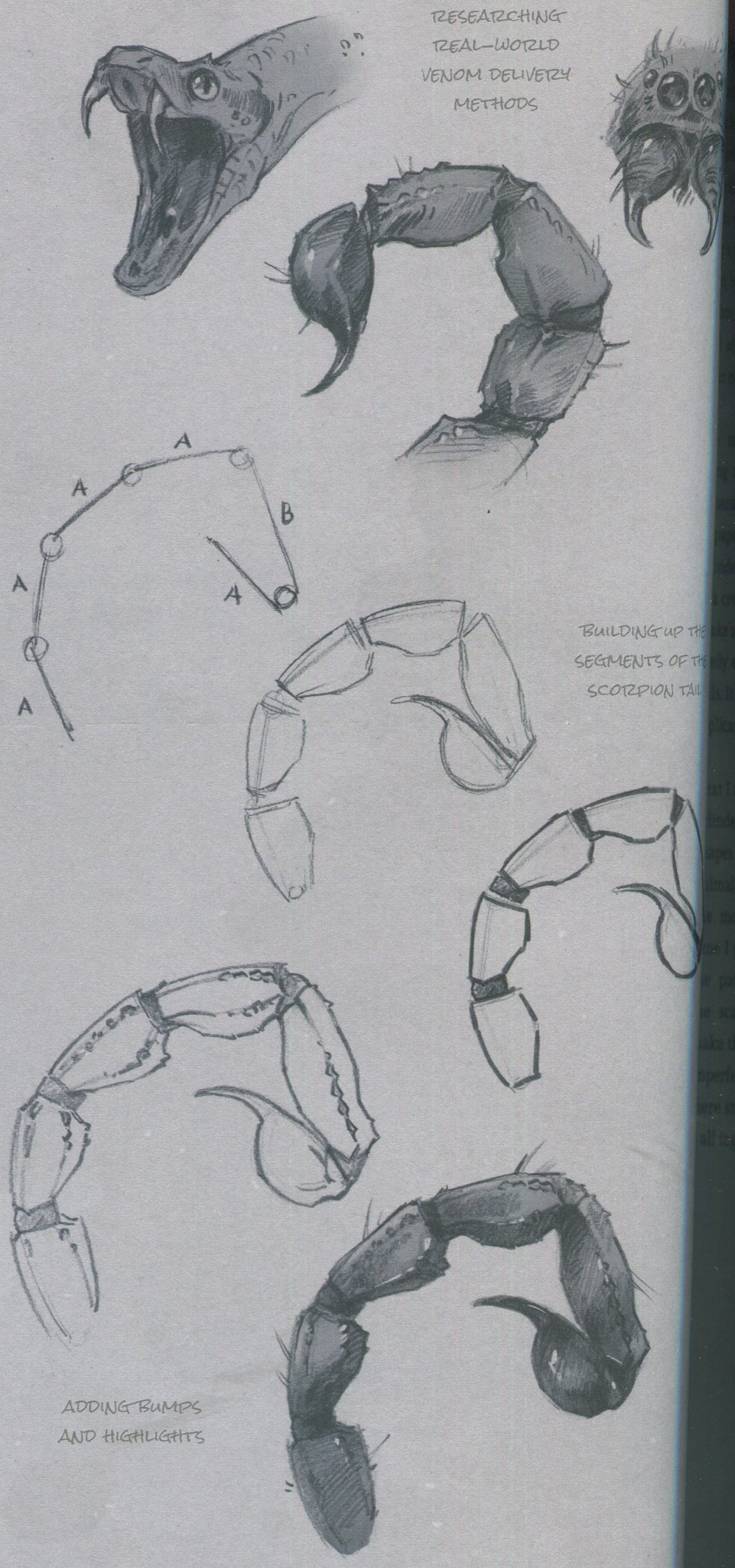


Venomous tails

There are many ways of secreting and injecting venom in the animal kingdom. From wasps and bees through to stingrays, snakes, or platypuses, venom is a popular survival strategy across a large number of species throughout many taxa. Usually delivered by a bite or a sting, it can be carried by more unusual means, such as sharp venom-tipped ribs, as in the case of some salamander species.

Here I focus on the anatomy of a scorpion's tail. Its construction is elegant but surprisingly simple. The first thing worth noticing when analyzing the scorpion's tail is the fact that it is segmented. Segmented body parts are one of the characteristics of the arachnid class that scorpions belong to. Most of the tail joints will be equal in length. The exception is the penultimate segment, which should be longer. This is the case in a great majority of scorpion species. Once the general proportion of the tail is sketched I move on to drawing the segments themselves. They should be irregular in shape but modular. The final stage consists of drawing the joints between the segments.

It is then time to start defining some of the details. Scorpions' tails are usually covered in small bumps. They should be more numerous around the edges, giving the tail a rough look. To draw more attention to the interesting shapes of the tail it is a good idea to make the joints visibly darker or lighter than the segments. This will help to accentuate the rhythm of the parts. Not forgetting the fact that scorpions are arachnids, as a final touch I add a few areas of high contrast and highlights to help convey the creepy-crawly feeling.

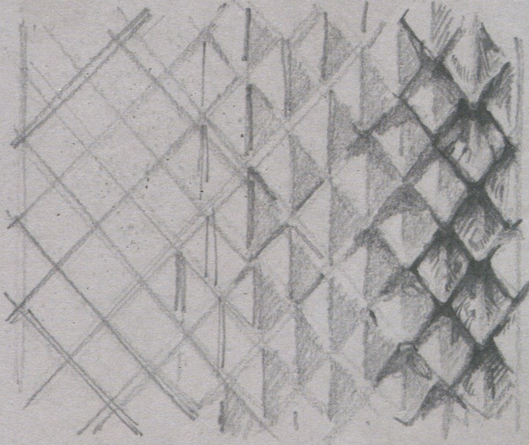


Reptilian scales

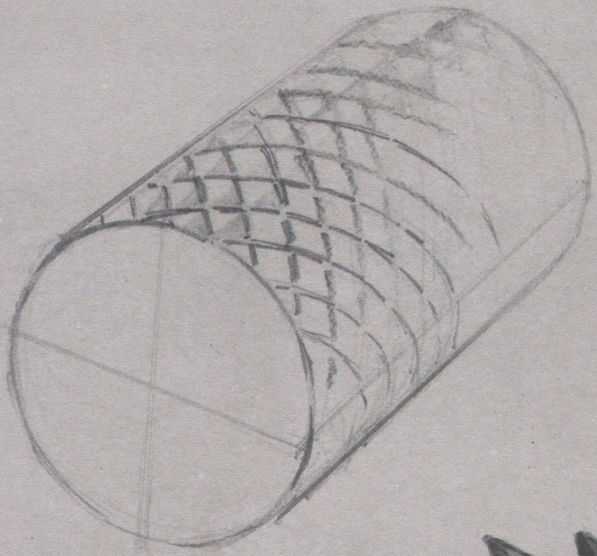
I now tackle the subject of scales. Scales are an amazing adaptation that provides animals with protection from both elements and predators. To fulfil their function, scales must be rigid and organized in a manner that can cover the whole of the skin in a geometric pattern. The easiest way to replicate scales when drawing is by using a simple rhomboid pattern. I start with a grid; by gradually adding shadows I create an illusion of a three-dimensional surface. This kind of motif is very easy to reproduce and cover even relatively large surfaces.

The next step in understanding scales is being able to depict them covering a three-dimensional object. I imagine rolling up a sheet of paper with a rhomboid pattern on it into a cylinder. This shape can then be extrapolated to a creature's torso, or elongated into a tail or snake's body. By rolling up the pattern I can easily experiment with what works and what fails. It allows me to find ways of texturing that replicate nature well, while being time efficient.

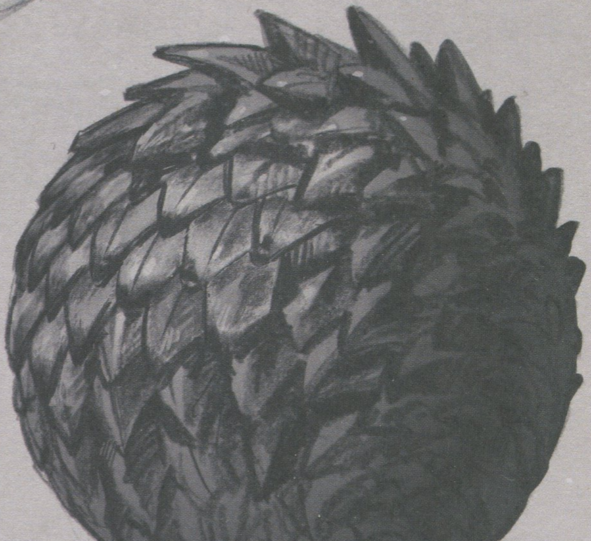
Next I render the scales. This time instead of a cylinder I use a sphere as a base. Both of these shapes can be used to symbolically block out animal parts. As in the previous step, I cover the model with the rhomboid pattern. This time I pick two poles of the sphere and twist the pattern between them. I avoid making the scales overly regular, but I also don't make them totally chaotic either. Scales need imperfections to make them feel more real, but there still needs to be some structure to bring it all together.



MARKING OUT A RHOMBOID PATTERN



WRAPPING THE PATTERN AROUND A THREE-DIMENSIONAL OBJECT



RENDERING SCALES ON A SPHERE

• DESIGN PROCESS •

Thumbnails

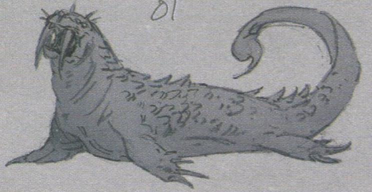
In this series of thumbnails I explored the possible silhouettes of the dingonek. Descriptions of this creature vary. Sometimes it is depicted as a walrus; sometimes it has a single horn on its forehead, like something from a fairy tale. It can be compared to a slick and graceful leopard but other times it is heavy and awkward, almost hippopotamus-like in its appearance. This great diversity of descriptions gave me a chance to try many variants for the silhouette. I tried to focus on and emphasize a different aspect in each one.

I also gave the creatures different levels of agility on land and in water. In some designs, the dingonek's main environment is water, so it would be clumsy on land. But for others I wanted the creature to be a competent hunter in both environments, so I tried a less walrus-like build, a design that is less heavy and not handicapped on land by massive fins.

An important aspect of the design is the huge canine teeth. Depending on the intended use, the positioning and the shape of the jaws could vary significantly. The dingonek's skull
never be light in build but the shape itsel
great scope.

You will also notice that as I sketched
thumbnails I did not find the scorpion-styl
to be as fitting. Though beautiful, I feel it
distinctly arachnid in design, so I searche
something that would harmonize better
the half-mammal/half-lizard theme.

01



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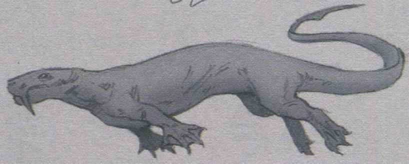

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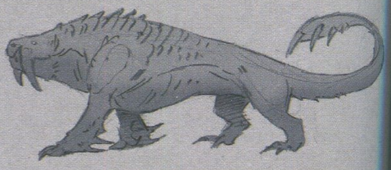

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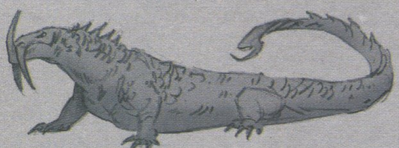

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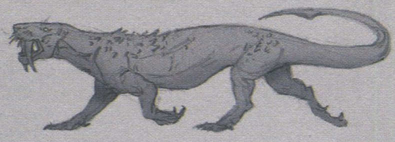

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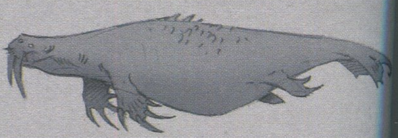

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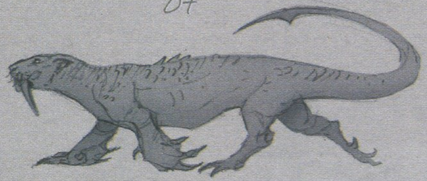

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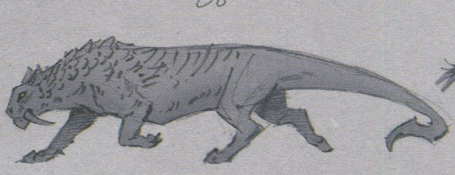

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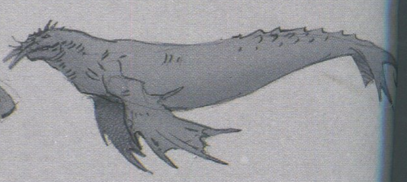

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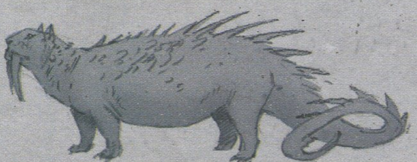

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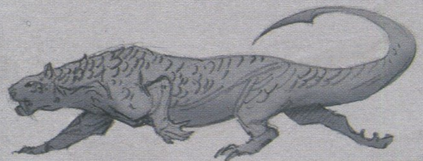

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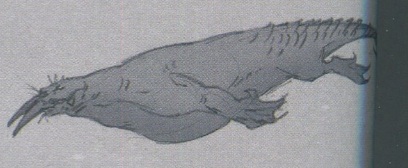
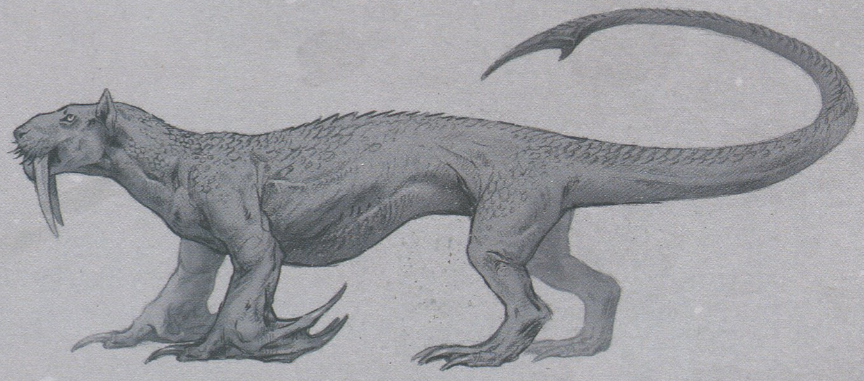


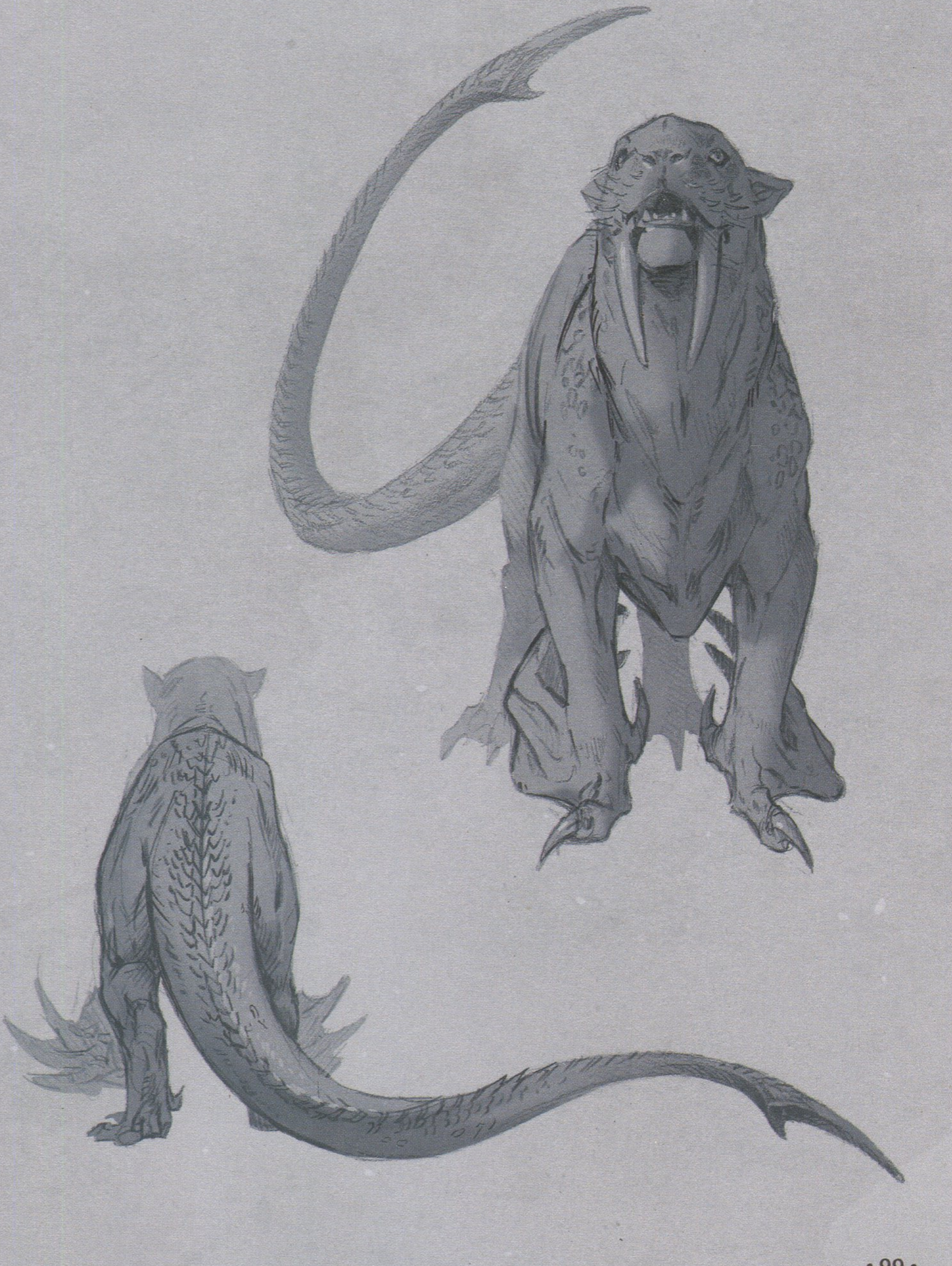
Further exploration

I decided to use the seventh thumbnail as I feel it combines all the features into one coherent creature. From the profile view the silhouette is strong but well balanced. It is an animal that could exist despite its exaggerated characteristics. I also like the fact that this design makes it possible for the dingonek to be a versatile hunter both on land and in water. Note the agile, cat-like quality of its body structure.

From the front you can gain more of an idea of the inner workings of the creature's front paws, which have an unusual construction. The creature supports most of its weight on its index digit and the knuckles of its middle and ring digits. When on land, most of the digits are folded backwards so as not to interfere with the walking process. In water the dingonek spreads them out to act as fins.

The tail of the dingonek is massive and muscular. It provides most of the force needed to propel the creature in water. I gave the venomous appendage a smooth, hydrodynamic shape in order to avoid inhibiting the creature's motion in water. My goal was to combine the design of a fishing spear, halberd, and scorpion's tail into an organic shape that nature could have created.

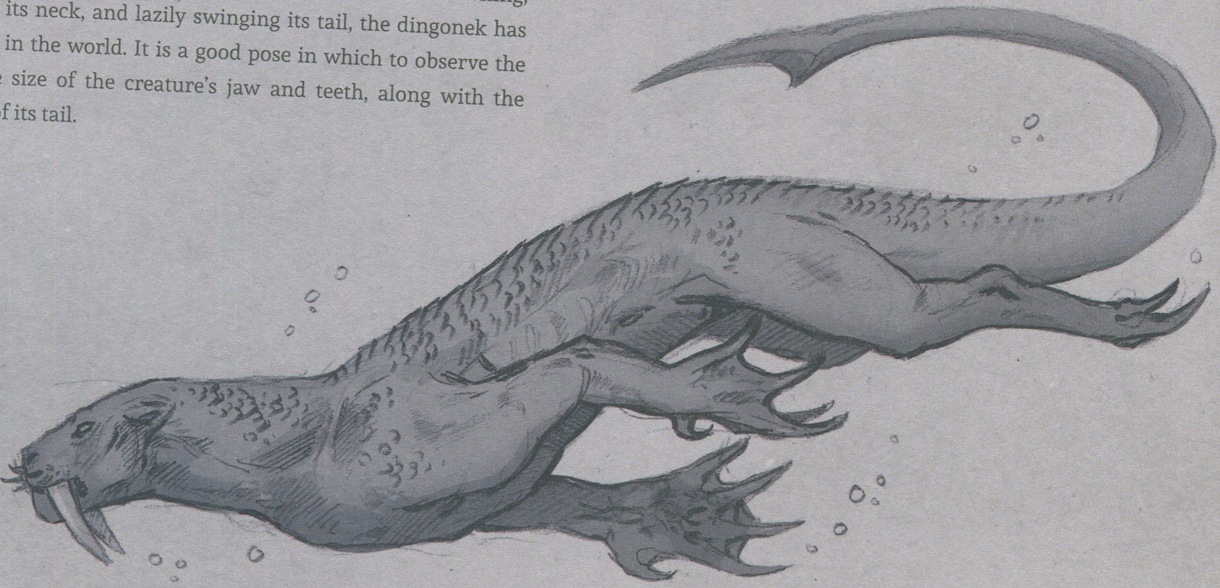


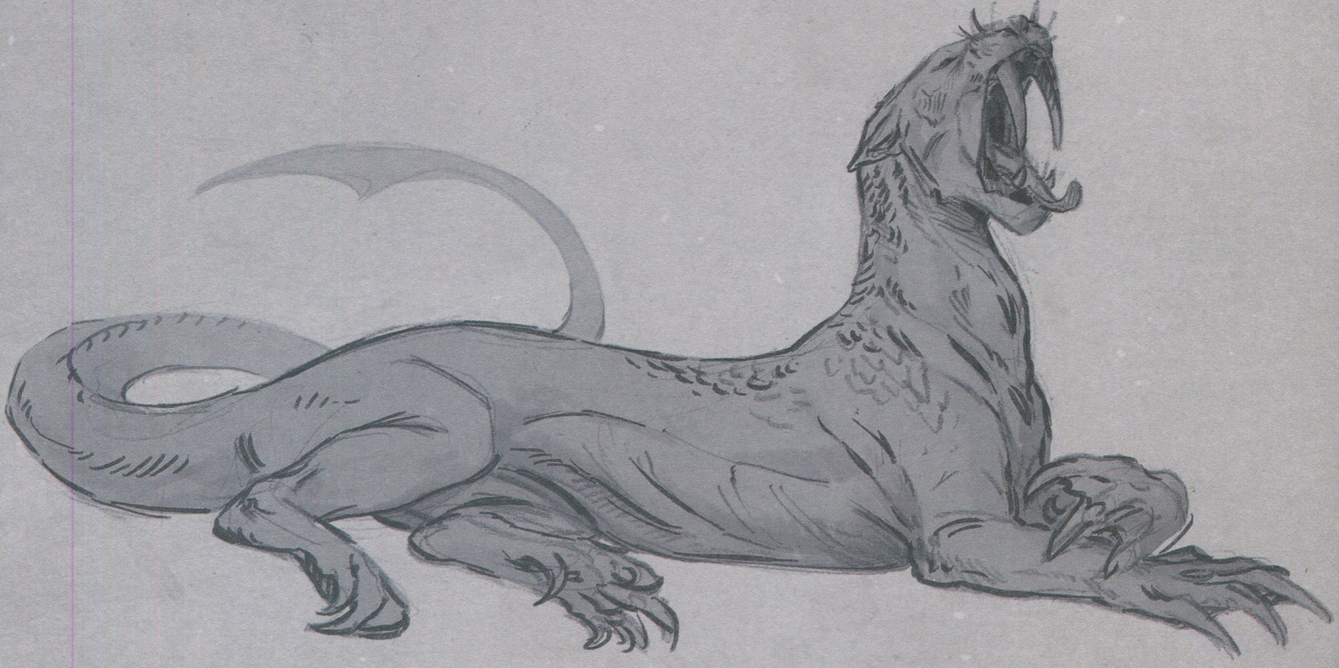


Poses

The first pose below demonstrates how the creature would look when swimming through water. Its paws have webbed digits and long, non-retractile claws. In this view you can see how flexible and true the spine of the dingonek is to its cat-like nature. I wanted to design a creature that could swim like an alligator (with side-to-side motion) as well as that of a dolphin (an up-and-down motion).

The next sketch shows a relaxed dingonek sunbathing. There are not many other animals that can pose a threat to the dingonek so it can sleep in the open, on warm rocks or riverbanks. After spending long hours ambushing its prey in the water, it needs to replenish its strength by taking a nap under the warm African sun. Yawning, stretching its neck, and lazily swinging its tail, the dingonek has not a care in the world. It is a good pose in which to observe the impressive size of the creature's jaw and teeth, along with the dexterity of its tail.





• SUBSPECIES •

Polar dingonek

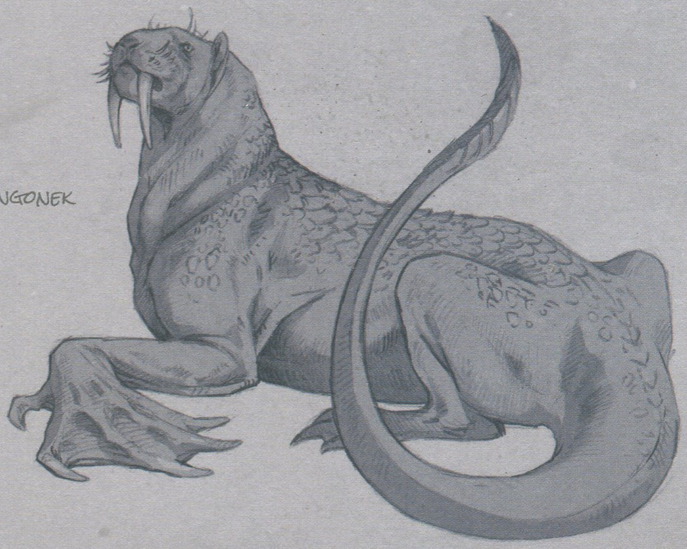
The polar dingonek's closest family member is the walrus, although its head is still very feline. Covered in blubber to keep it warm and provide it with energy, this subspecies is by no means graceful on land. Although it can still move from place to place, its main hunting grounds are the ocean depths. Its sturdy upper body structure means that fights between competing males can be quite destructive.

Marine dingonek

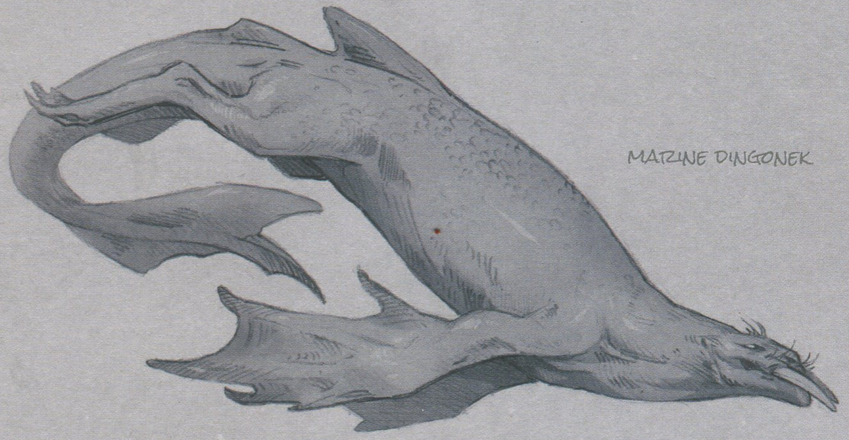
This subspecies of dingonek is fully aquatic. While the polar dingonek spends most of its life around the coastal zone, the marine dingonek inhabits the open oceans. For this reason it has a more hydrodynamic shape. The fins are bigger and stronger, allowing the creature to swim after prey at great speed. A dorsal fin provides stabilization. To reduce water resistance, this dingonek has developed a smooth body surface. The saber teeth protrude forward for the same reason, creating a highly streamlined silhouette.

Miniature dingonek

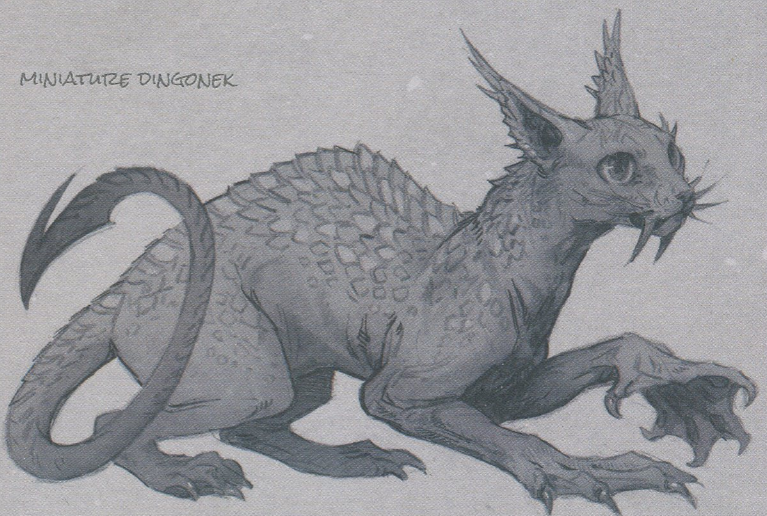
This dingonek is to the regular dingonek what a house cat is to a lion. It mainly hunts fish and rodents. Because of its small size it can also become prey, so it has evolved to suit a nocturnal lifestyle; its large ears and eyes allow it to hear and see more in the dark. Unlike its larger cousins, the miniature dingonek uses it venomous tail not for hunting but as a defensive measure. Due to its shy and cautious nature, this creature prefers riverbanks with rich vegetation providing it with many hideouts.



POLAR DINGONEK



MARINE DINGONEK

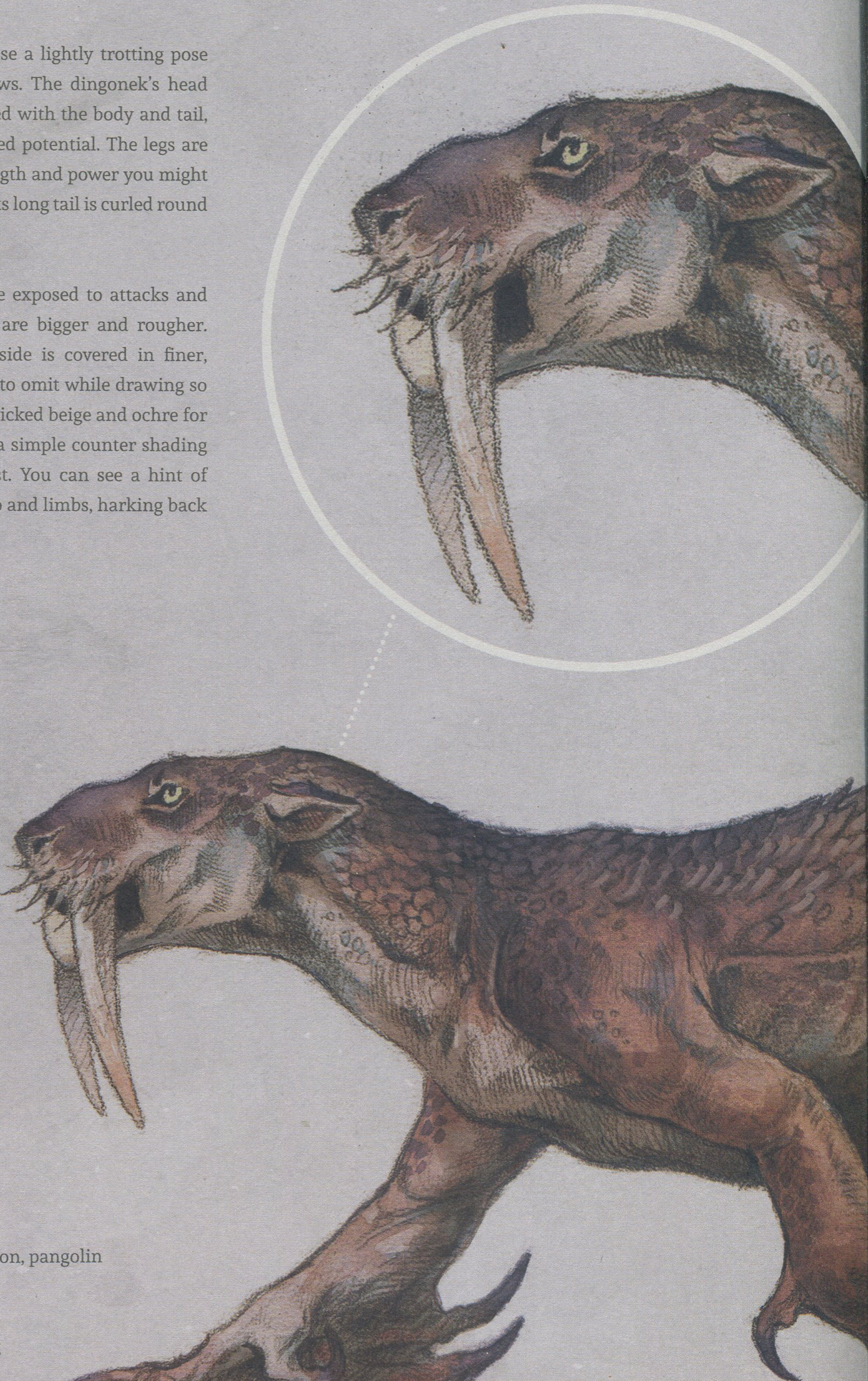


MINIATURE DINGONEK

• FINAL DESIGN •

For the final design I decided to use a lightly trotting pose to showcase the design of the paws. The dingonek's head and neck are extremely streamlined with the body and tail, reflecting its feline agility and speed potential. The legs are quite muscular, adding to the strength and power you might associate with its walrus heritage. Its long tail is curled round for balance and is poised to strike.

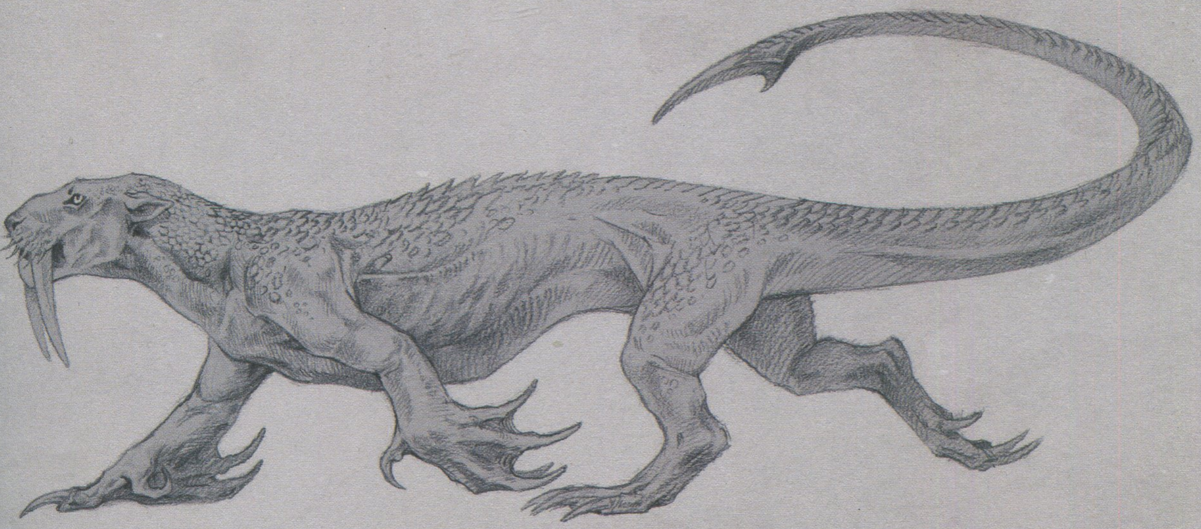
The upper side of its body is more exposed to attacks and the elements, so the scales there are bigger and rougher. Meanwhile, the dingonek's underside is covered in finer, more delicate scales that I decided to omit while drawing so as not to over-texture the image. I picked beige and ochre for its main colors because I felt that a simple counter shading pattern would fit the creature best. You can see a hint of leopard-style markings on the torso and limbs, harking back to its feline origins.

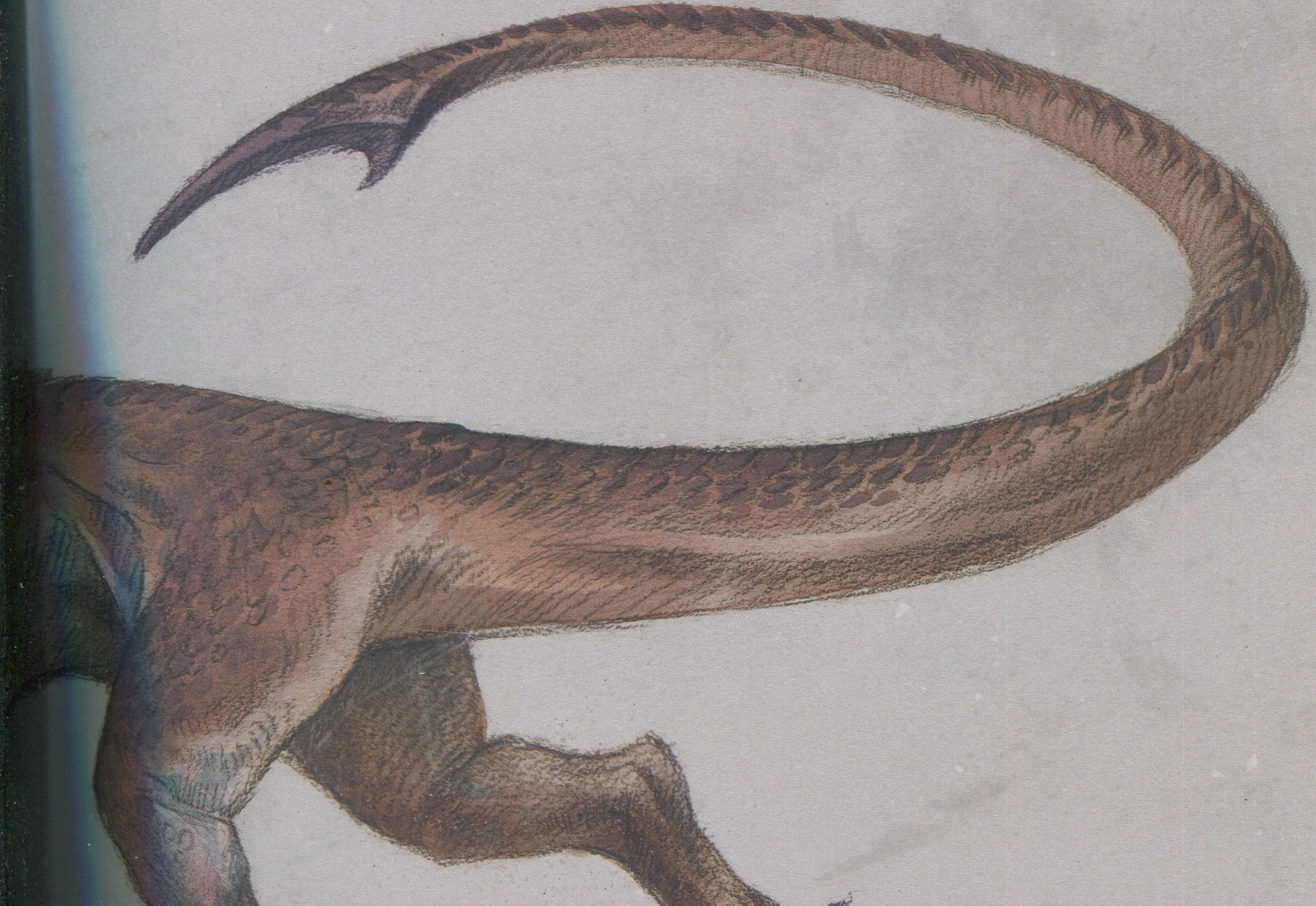


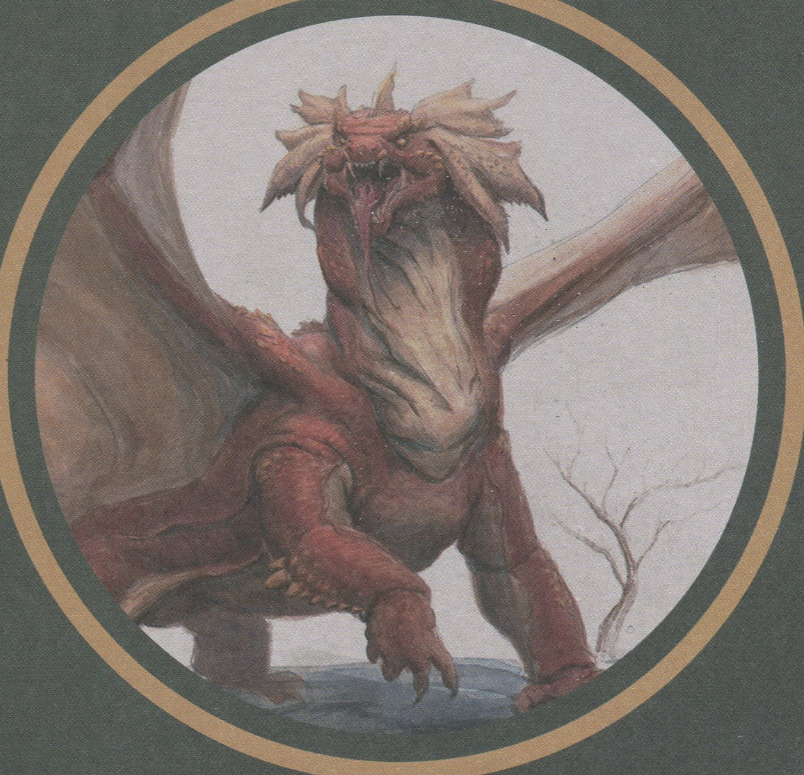
Key facts

Name: Dingonek
Taxonomy: Leopard, walrus, scorpion, pangolin
Region: West Africa
Habitat: Rivers and ponds
Mythical abilities: Venomous sting
Threat to humans: 4

Final image © Anna Podedworna







• EUROPEAN DRAGON •

The European dragon is a fantastic creature described in many mythologies in which it is both feared and admired. Appearance, siz
temperament vary greatly in folklore across Europe, although typically this type of dragon has been described as a reptile with bat-like
sometimes with horns, crests, and spikes. They have also been said to breathe fire or possess poison. They usually have six limbs (includin
wings) and are commonly included in heraldry. It is believed that some members of ancient cultures kept them as pets, usually in palaces or
by dragon masters who were able to deal with their fury. Dragons are very popular in fantasy stories, sometimes as a friend but mostly as
enemy or threat to heroes. They are said to like metal and therefore create their lairs on castle ruins with abandoned treasures.

• LUCAS PAROLIN •

Illustrator & concept artist • lucasparolin.com

• FIELD NOTES •

Lizard posture

Studying lizards is a pleasure. They are fascinating creatures. I want to get a feel for their posture so that I can use that attitude in the dragon design. Some lizards look very imposing and while I study them I actively think about why that is. I can then apply what I learn in order to make the dragon look impressive and majestic.

Lizard dewlaps

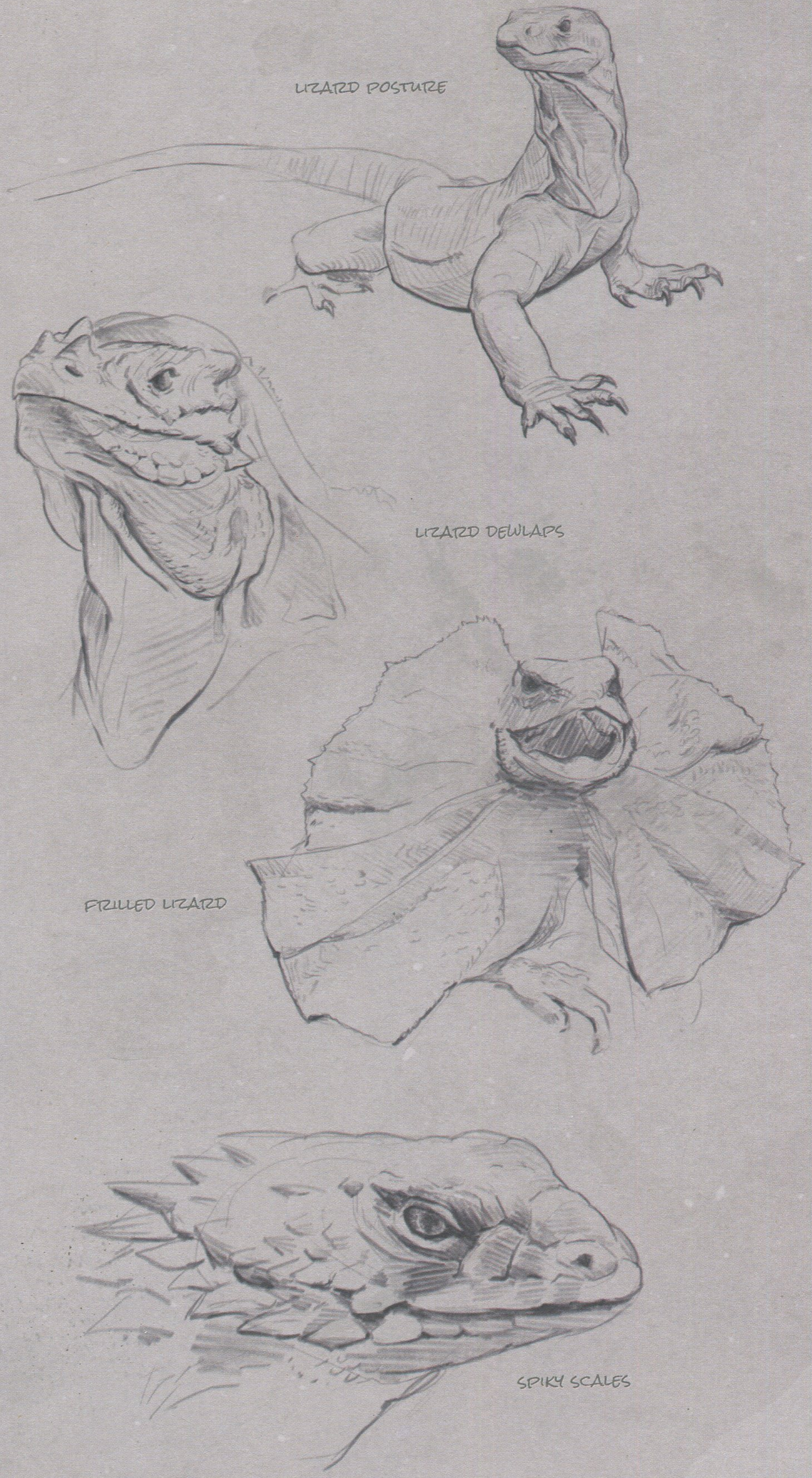
During my research I also note that lizards have a large dewlap (fold of skin) and some type of bulge on their neck. This is something that I can imagine having a specific function on the dragon design: to enable fire breathing. It could be filled with chemicals that mix with the air that comes out of the lungs and ignites into an all-consuming inferno.

Frilled lizard

Another element I look into is the membrane of the frilled lizard. The membrane has a very interesting shape and could be adapted to work as wings on the dragon; you don't always have to use an obvious choice to reference a body part. If you search well, you will find that nature has plenty of sources of inspiration that do not directly relate to what you are designing, and you can still draw information from them. The benefit of studying this rather than an actual bat wing is that I can easily see how the element would work in the context of a reptile.

Spiky scales

A scaly texture will be very important in the dragon design. I really like how the scales on the lizard sketched on the right turn into spikes. This could enhance the fierce and fantastical element of the beast. Spikes are also reminiscent of prehistoric creatures such as dinosaurs, and as the dragon is an ancient myth this could work well in terms of conveying the monster's age.

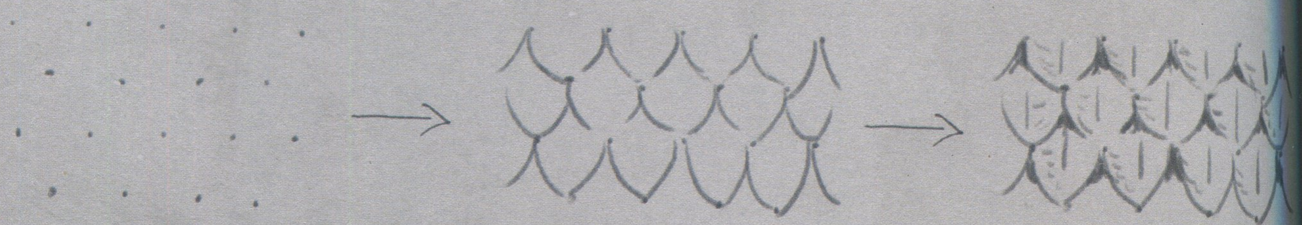


Scales

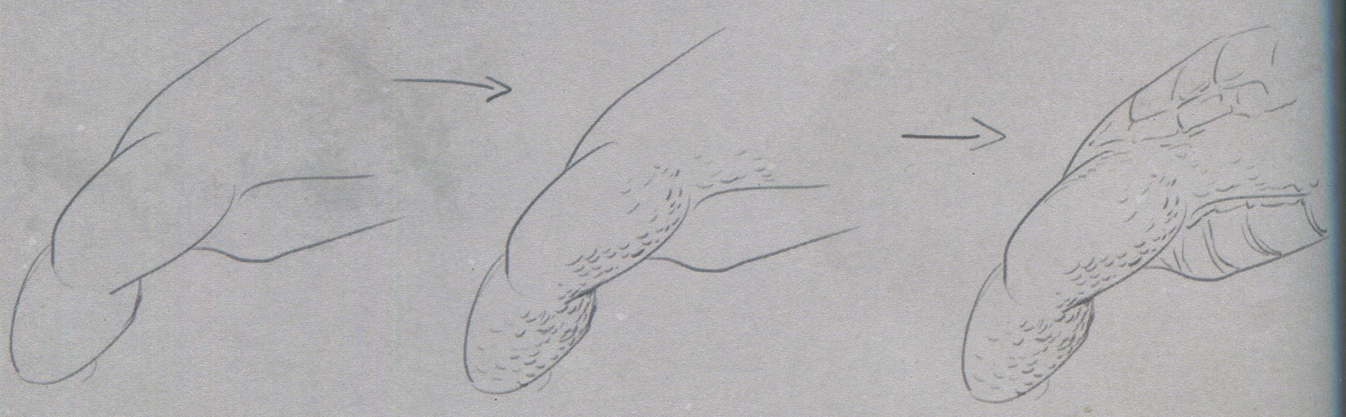
Close-up, scales have different patterns and shapes; they can be more rounded or pointy, depending on the animal. I first mark some directional points in relation to their structure, then connect the dots with curved lines, resulting in a repeating pattern of intersecting scales. After that I add detail. Some scales can be rougher and some are more shiny and polished. It is a good idea to hint at the occlusion shadow by darkening areas between the scales. As I will be working on scales as seen from afar, however, it will be better to suggest the scales rather than sketch them all in detail, which could make the drawing look too busy and over-detailed.

One way to make the most of scales without over-detailing an image is to draw the scales on plane changes on the skin. If it is a rounded surface, such as in the examples on the second row below, I can add scales to create three-dimensionality as well as texture.

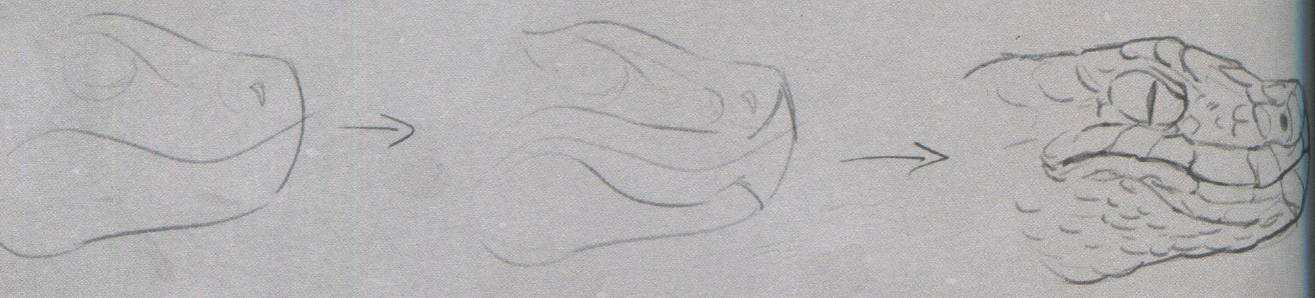
On the head of some reptiles the scales ca bigger and appear more random in shap can use this to my favor. First of all I estab the shape of the head and then imagine h I want the lines to flow. I then add the sca accordingly and with some variation so th doesn't look artificial. I refer back to real-wo references to see how scales are shaped arou facial features.



CONNECTING POINTS TO DEVELOP ROUGHLY DETAILED SCALES



USING SCALES TO HINT AT THREE DIMENSIONALITY



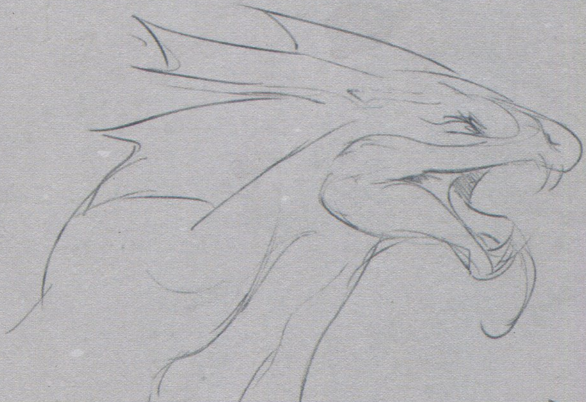
MARKING SCALES ON A HEAD

Reptilian head

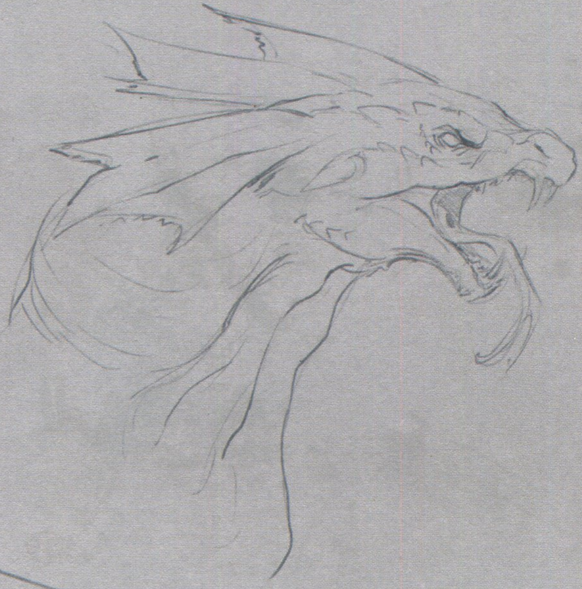
Since the European dragon is depicted as a reptilian creature, I want to emphasize the lizard motif. But a reptile head can have a multitude of variations, so how do I develop one that is unique? The first thing I consider is the big shapes. After that I can break them into smaller ones. I always keep in mind the gesture for those shapes, starting large and then breaking into smaller gestures.

Working on those smaller gestures flowing from the initial marks, I am mindful of how the smaller lines relate to the whole rhythm of the drawing. From my research I really liked the idea of the dragon having a frill around its head, as this creates quite a fearsome, intimidating look. I also consider the mouth of a snake, with large dangerous fangs. I slant the eye downwards slightly to give the dragon an evil appearance.

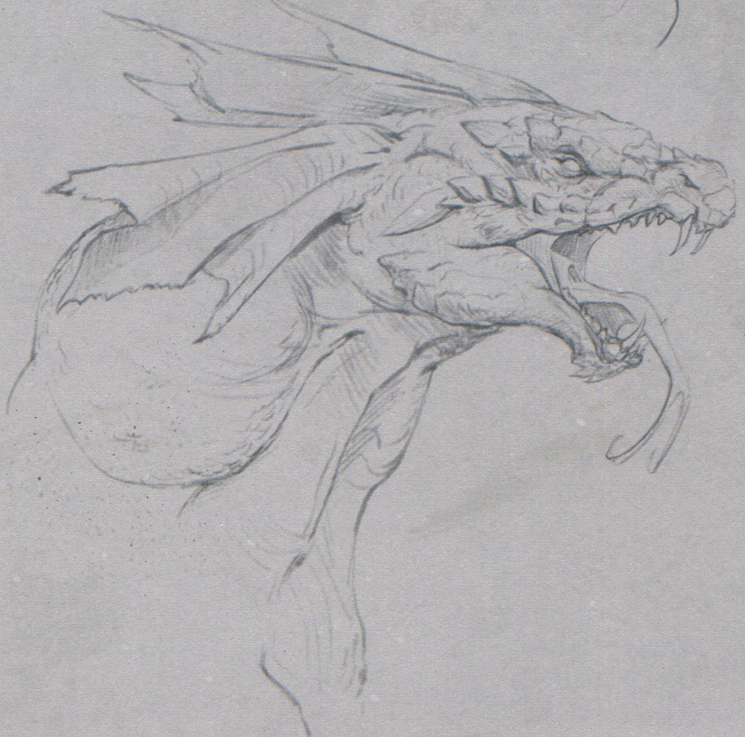
I then add more details, thinking about how the lines impact on the impression of the dragon's personality as a whole. I make sure the frills have some tears along the edges so the dragon looks battle-worn. I add larger, spikier scales around the eye area to draw attention to his evil nature. It is fine to redraw a sketch several times; if you are creating, you are testing things, and you may need to see some of the alterations to know how well they would work.



STARTING WITH LARGE GESTURAL SHAPES



INTRODUCING KEY ELEMENTS



USING SHAPES TO EMPHASIZE THE DRAGON'S NATURE

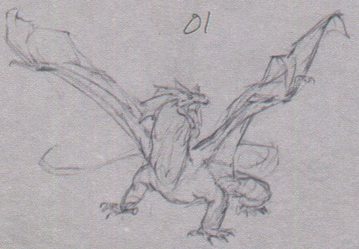
• DESIGN PROCESS •

Thumbnails

When sketching the thumbnails, I kept in mind the lizard feel I want the design to have. I used thick, muscular limbs in most of the thumbnails, which works well in terms of suggesting strength and power, while keeping *the lizard anatomy in mind. I also kept the* neck quite thick, again suggesting the dragon's toughness and stability. As the dragon is typically depicted as a malevolent beast, the predatory poses work well.

I tested out where to best place the tail; bringing *it into the foreground adds some depth to the* image, and enhances the impression of the dragon's size and intimidating nature. I tri to work out the anatomy of the wings an the various positions they could be in. Ope wings suggest more action and movement, s I will definitely use this going forward. I wi also use an open mouth to demonstrate th *dragon's aggression.*

01



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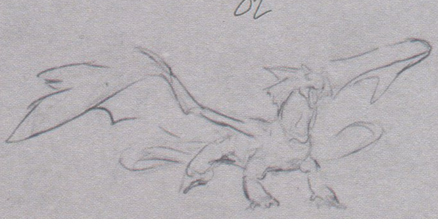

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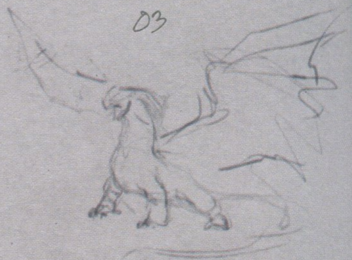

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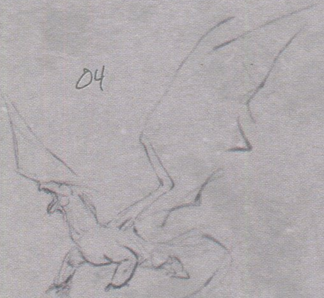

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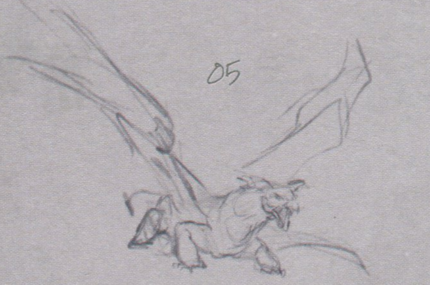

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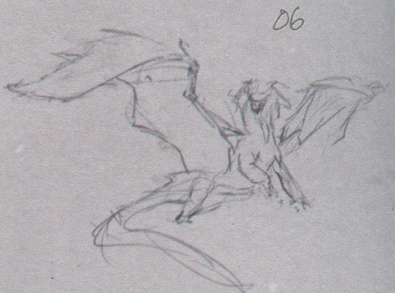

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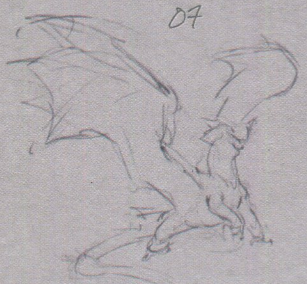

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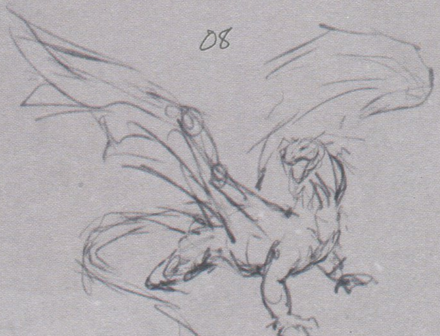

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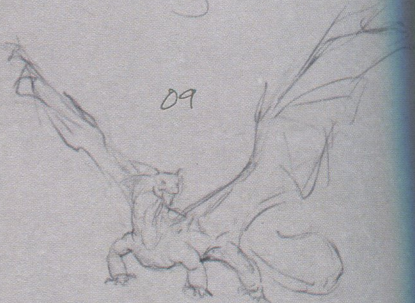

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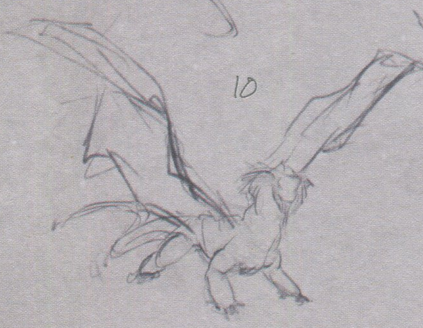

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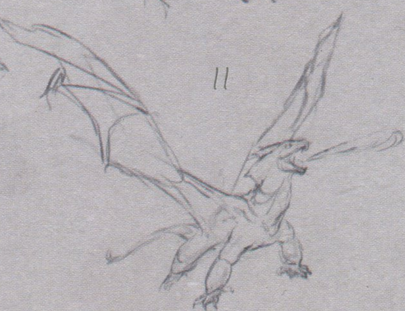

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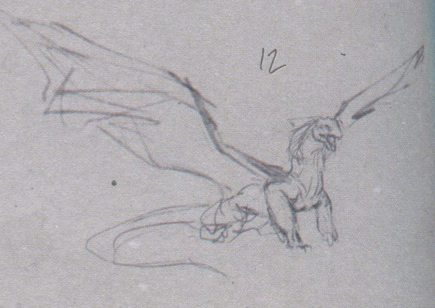
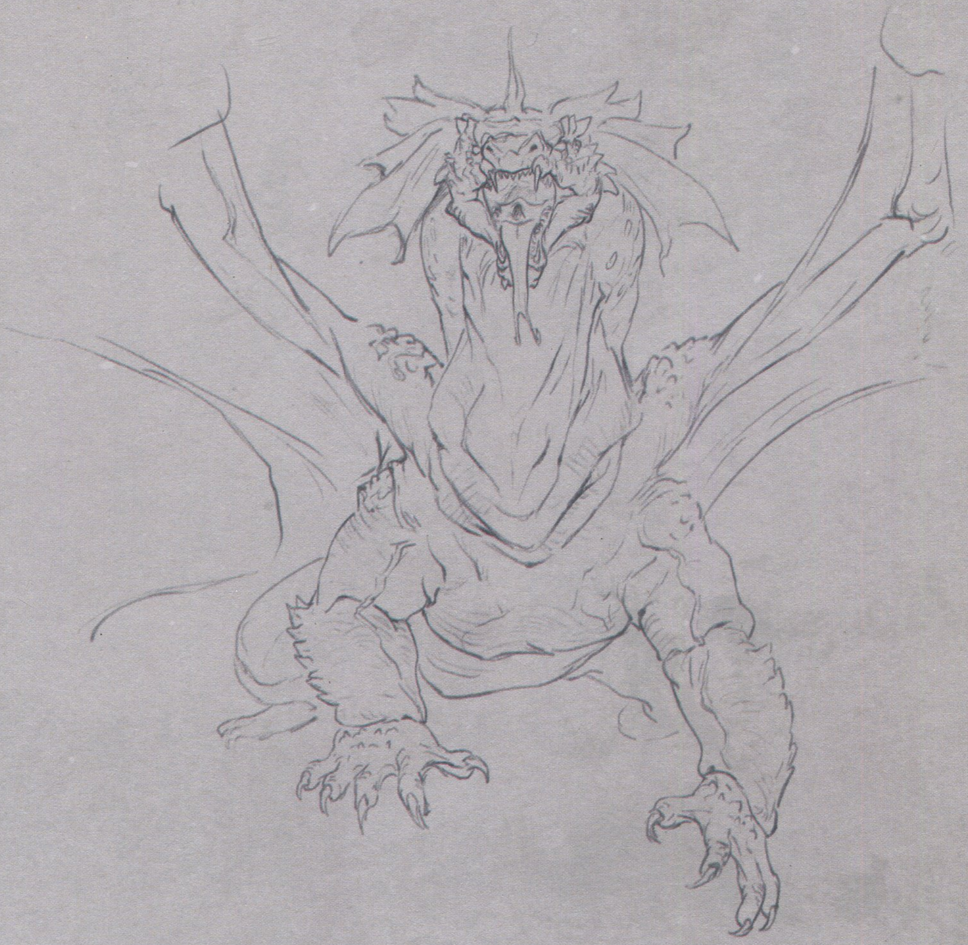
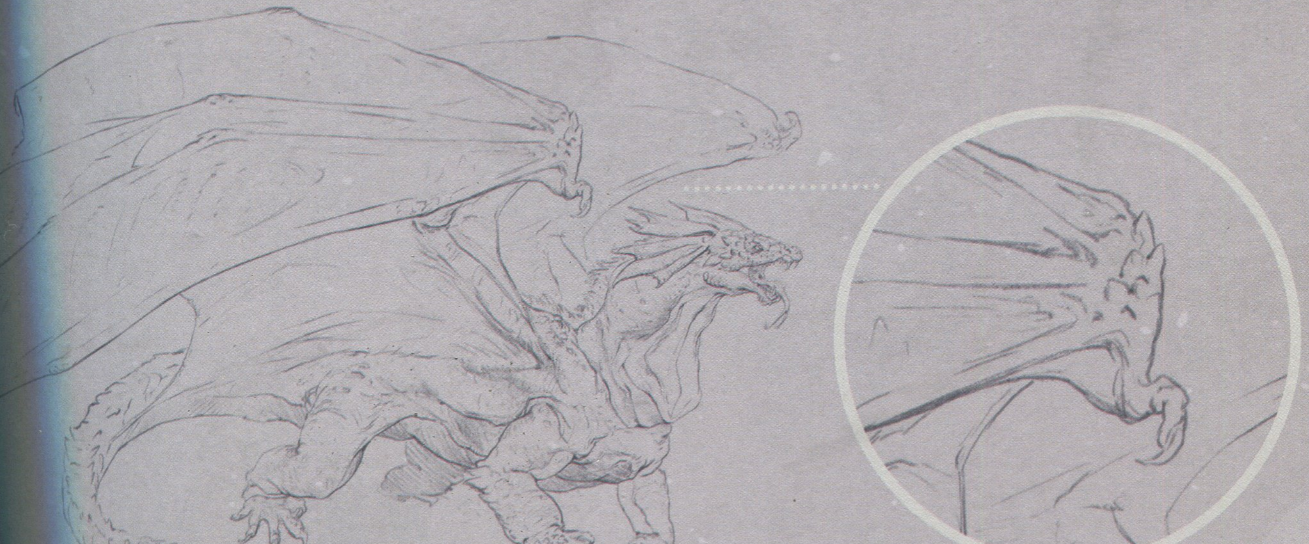


er exploration

to keep the beast very lizard-like but in some of the aggression that a dragon convey. From the front you can really wide the frills of the head are, creating eresting and fearsome silhouette. the frill is based on that of a lizard, d it to make it something unique, since is not to copy a real-world animal but spired by some of its characteristics. also observe how large and robust the again based on studies of real-world This element is key for the dragon's thing capabilities in my design. Note claws and armored forelimbs.

side view you can best observe the shape and key features of the dragon. e language of the frills and wings is which helps make the design coherent. earching bat wings as well, I decided their claw-like digits at the top of the wing, which adds to the threatening the beast. I created a forked tongue, dds a terrifying, demonic element. You see the intimidating spiky scales on on's tail. The tail ends in a spade shape, common among European dragon nd heraldry: consider the Welsh flag, ple.



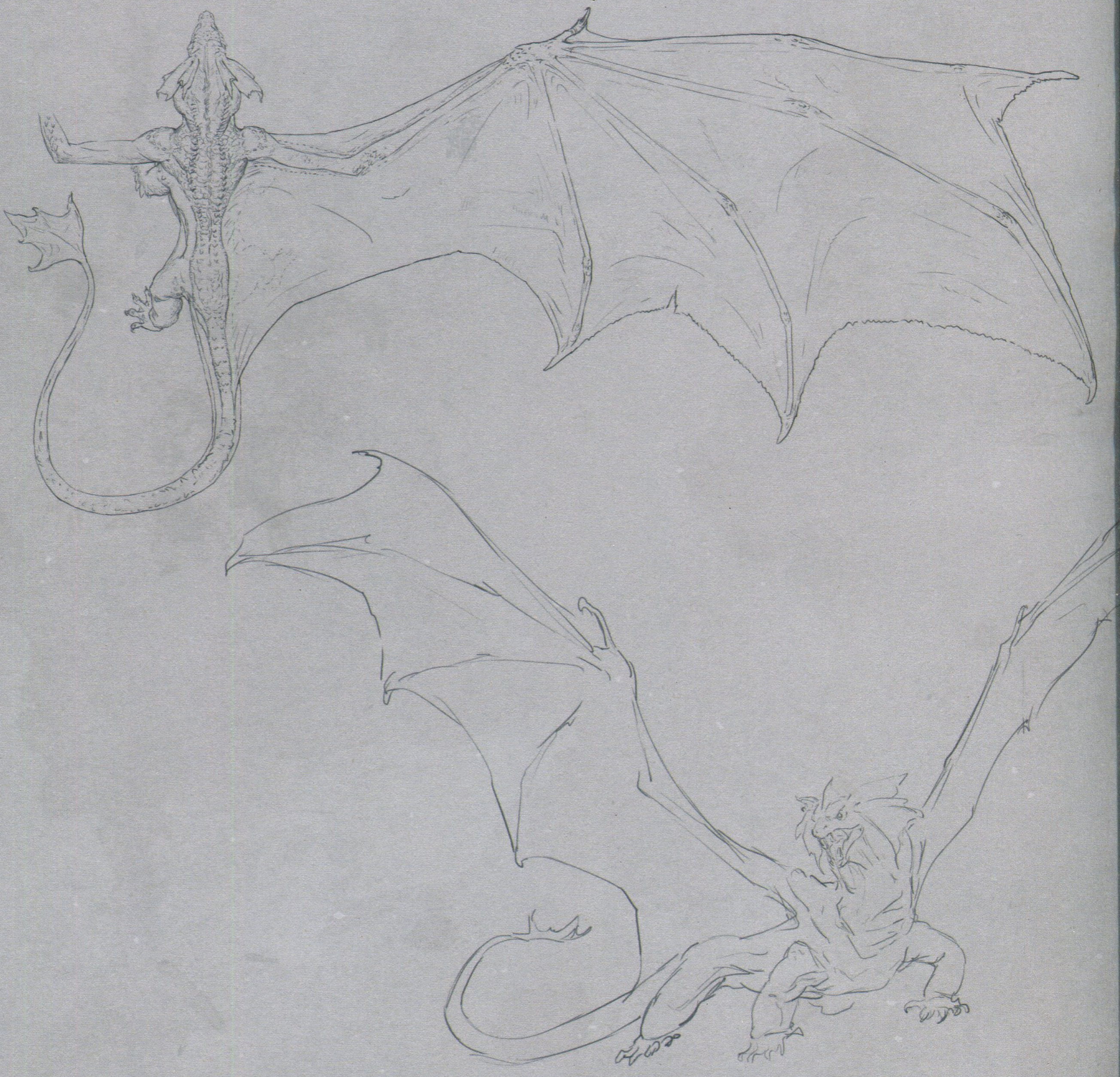


Poses

From above you can really appreciate the impressive wingspan of the dragon. If you were to observe bat wings, you would notice that the limb is not that muscular in terms of size and volume, and some dragon illustrations throughout history have been portrayed this way. However, it will be important to find a balance between this and the heavy musculature I have selected for the dragon's neck and other four limbs. As the beast is so large, it will need slightly bulkier muscles than those of a bat.

You can also see how the spiky scales on the tail carry on up the back of the creature, dividing into two clear lines that go up towards the head. This adds interest and gives the dragon a fierce, crocodilian appearance.

In a more three-quarter pose I further
the wings opened up and stretched o
would be very intimidating because it
the dragon's apparent size. The ta
upwards provides a sense of action,
dragon is in the middle of a battle wit
creature. The mouth is open to demo
dangerousness and aggression. I do
the angle of this pose is quite right th



• SUBSPECIES •

Swamp dragon

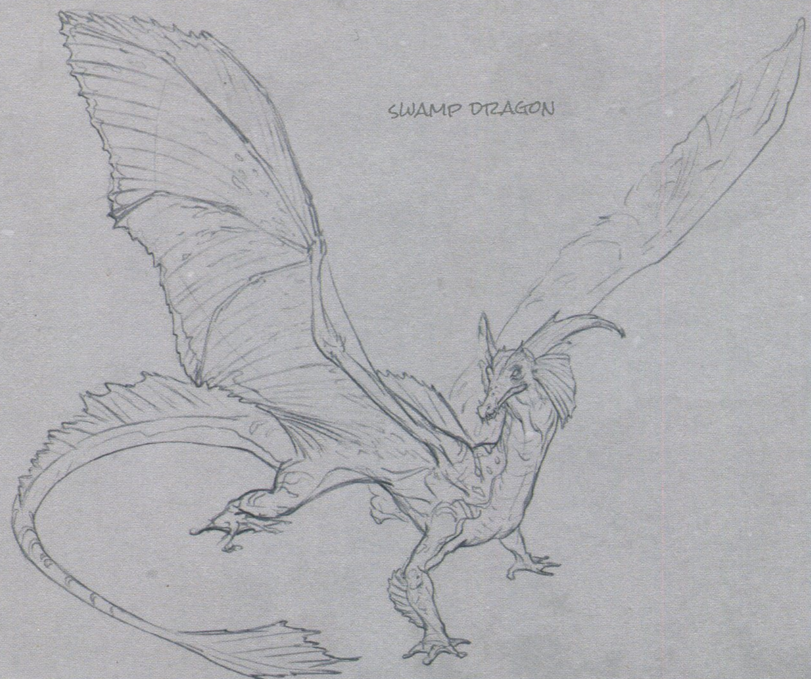
Unlike many other swamp-dwelling animals whose appearance is dedicated to camouflage, the swamp dragon is at the top of the food chain so its adornment is in fact rather ornamental and elegant. The creature's streamlined body and fish-like fin along its back and tail help it swim through thick, murky waters. While it still has a frill like its common cousin, it is split into four separate, almost horn-like components, producing an intimidating silhouette.

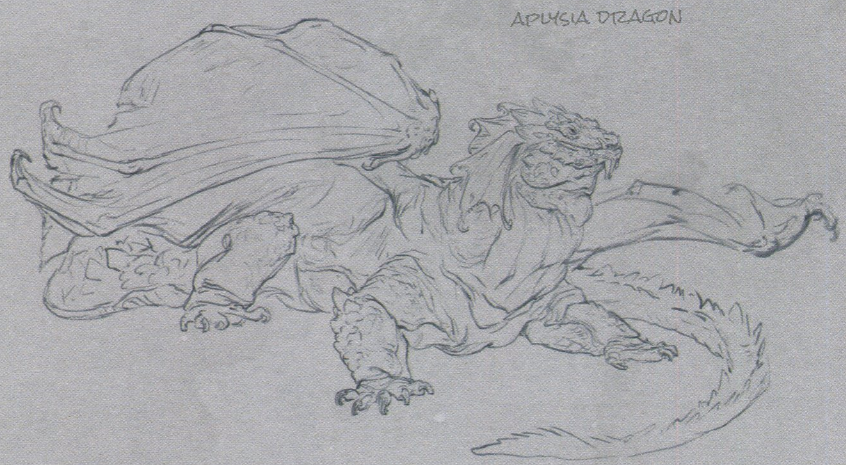
Aplysia dragon

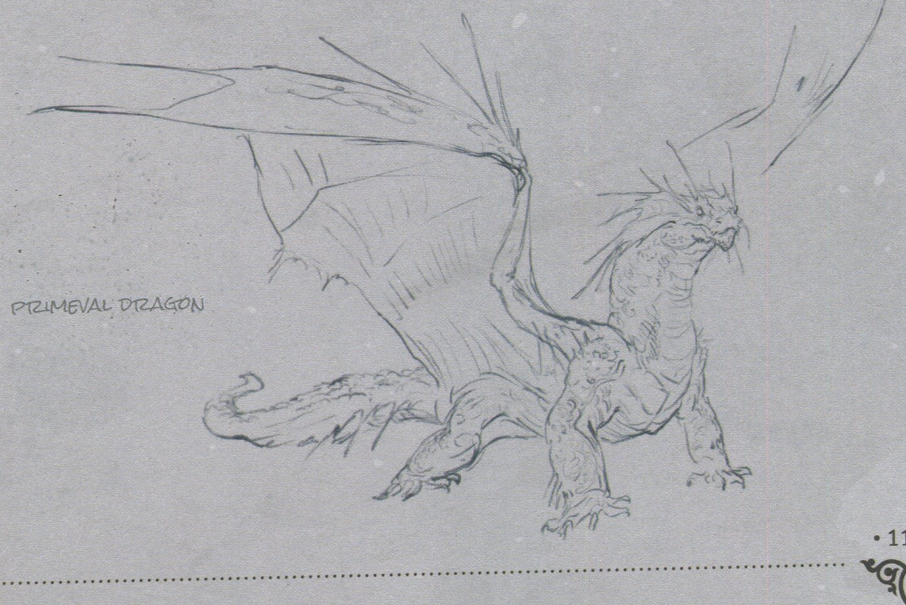
Aplysia is a type of sea slug that can grow very large and emits a cloud of ink when it feels threatened. Many of the species have frills and folds, which you can see replicated in the Aplysia dragon. It is less mobile than other types of European dragon and tends to move more closely to the ground when it does move. Even though this creature is slow, it is still incredibly vicious, which you may believe from its tiny black eye, sneering smile, and pointed fangs.

Primeval dragon

The primeval dragon is an ancient ancestor of the common European dragon. While the build of the two types is very similar, older dragons are often thought of as more mystic than younger ones, and this creature is particularly wise and powerful. The main visual difference is in the head crest – primeval dragons have thinner, tapered segments.





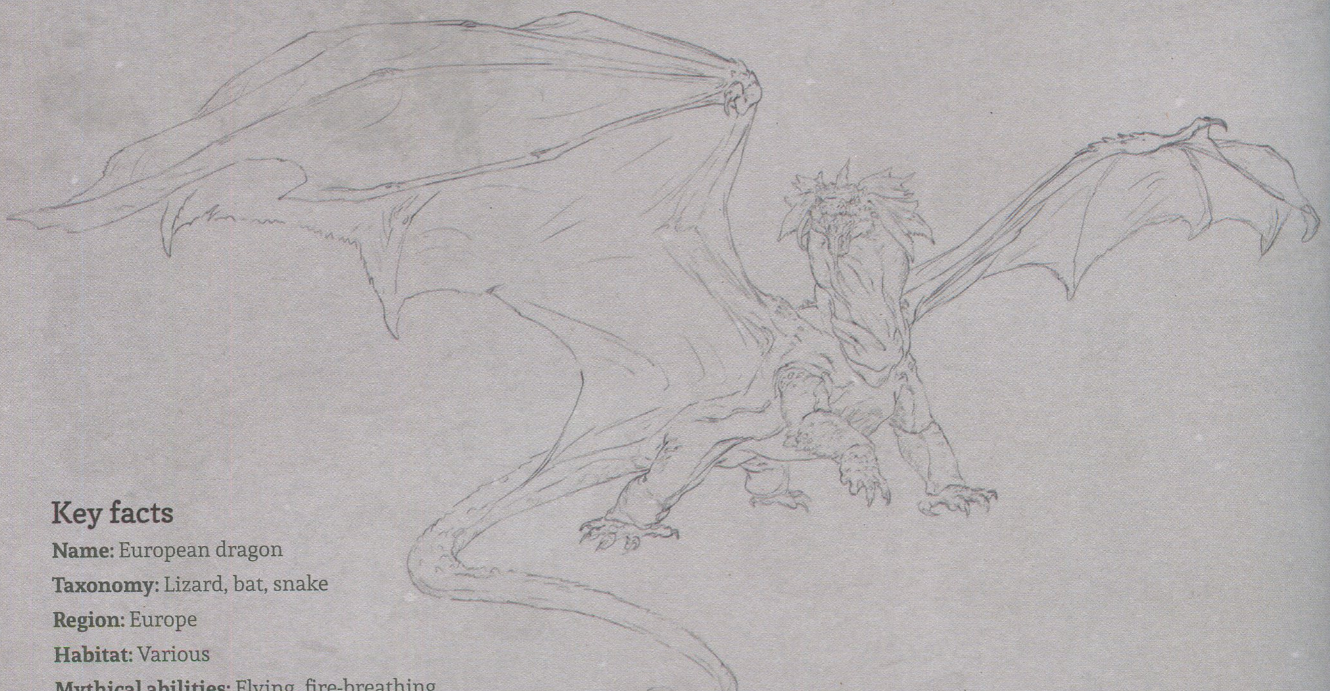


• FINAL DESIGN •

I wanted the dragon to look almost like a lizard but with an element of fantasy so that the traditional concept of a dragon was not lost. The result is a mythical creature rooted in reality. Here you can see the European dragon in its prime, looking very imposing and striking fear into people's hearts at mere sight. Its fiery breath can melt down armor and shields quickly, which is why it is incredibly hard to fight one successfully; it usually requires special equipment and magic.

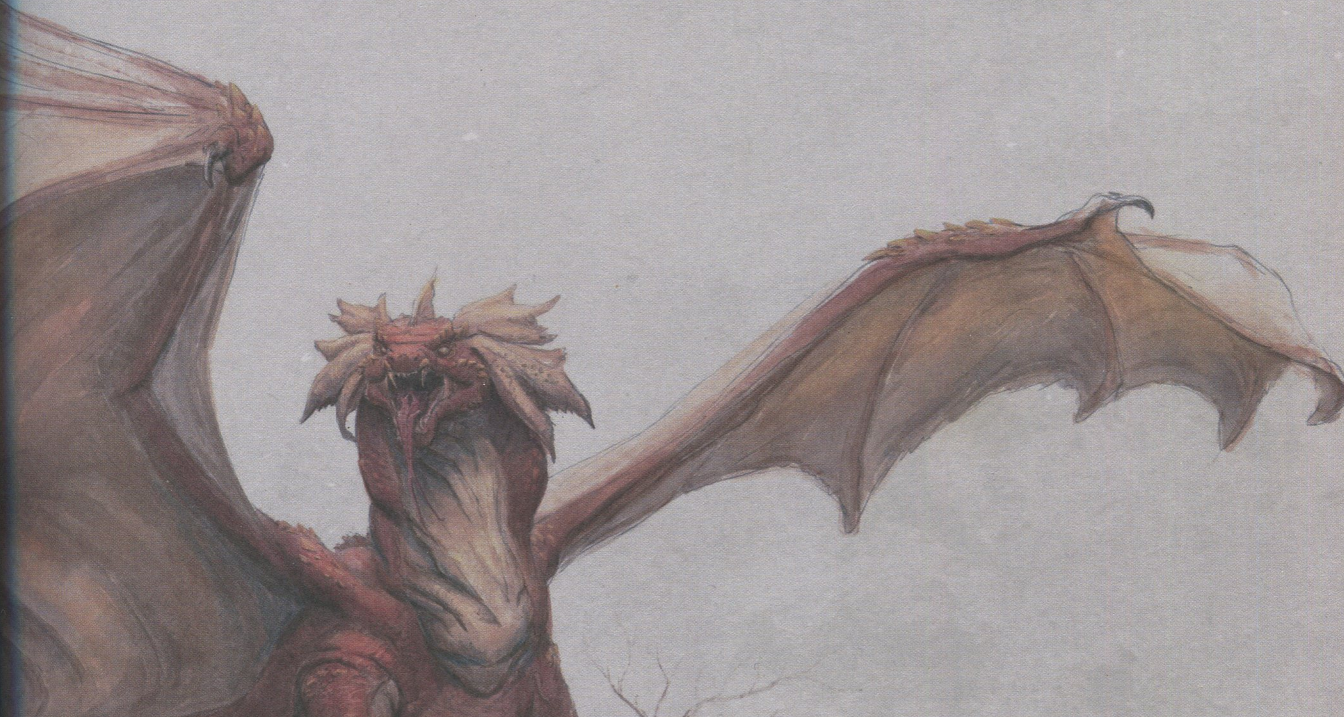
The mouth is open as if the dragon is roaring and shows its demonic, serpentine forked tongue. There is a slight twist of the neck, as if it has just spotted prey or an approaching enemy. The extra rows of spikes on its forelimbs, wings, and around his face are used in defense in battle.

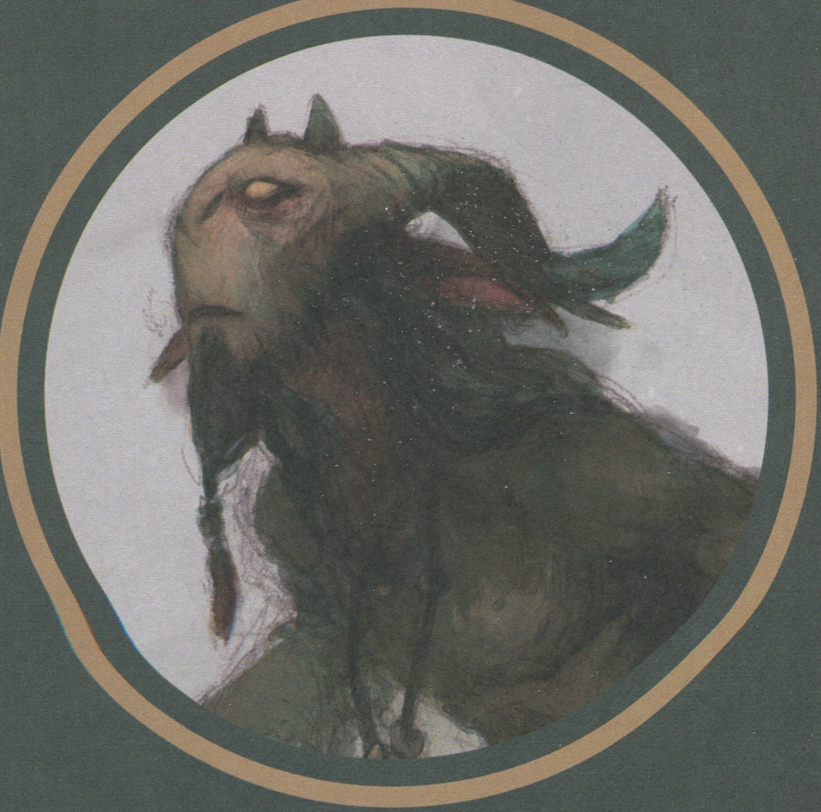
The way the tail slopes down and enters the foreground of the image creates a pleasing flow, and also draws the viewer in. The wings are folded slightly, which offers visual repetition alongside the frills. One of the reasons I chose this pose was the fact that it takes up less space, which means I can show the dragon as a whole. The tree in the background adds a sense of scale.



Key facts
Name: European dragon
Taxonomy: Lizard, bat, snake
Region: Europe
Habitat: Various
Mythical abilities: Flying, fire-breathing
Threat to humans: 5

Final image © Lucas Parolin





• FAUN •

The faun is one of the oldest and most magical of woodland creatures. They can be found in the deepest forests of Europe and occasiona
the surrounding mountains. Fauns are humanoid in appearance from the waist up and have the legs and horns of a goat. They generally st
foot taller than humans. Fauns have a deep and spiritual connection to nature; they are both wise and curious in personality. In Celtic cu
of Europe the faun is often linked to magic and mystical rituals, and although they are not inherently evil, there is often an underlying t
fear when they are discussed. Interactions between fauns and humans who traveled through forests used to be fairly common; however,
are becoming increasingly rare. It is thought that the nature-loving fauns prefer to observe the industrialized human world from afar.
mysterious creatures do not wear clothing but adorn themselves with jewelry made from sticks, bones, and pebbles. It is thought they are not
for aesthetic reasons but ritual and magical purposes, but this has never been confirmed. Many fauns sport tattoos on the hairless parts o
bodies. These are usually simple spirals and other ancient symbols of nature.

• ÁLVARO RAMÍREZ •

Illustrator & concept artist • alvaroramirezart.com

• FIELD NOTES •

Goats

The faun is basically half-goat and half-human, so I will study both to make sure my design is as accurate as possible. First I study goats and pay close attention to details such as the volume of the fur and how it falls, as well as the face and general anatomy. Goats are interesting animals in terms of how they walk, run, jump, and climb, so I look at videos and real goats to closely study these actions. This will give me a much better idea of how they move and how to fit their anatomy with human anatomy.

Horns

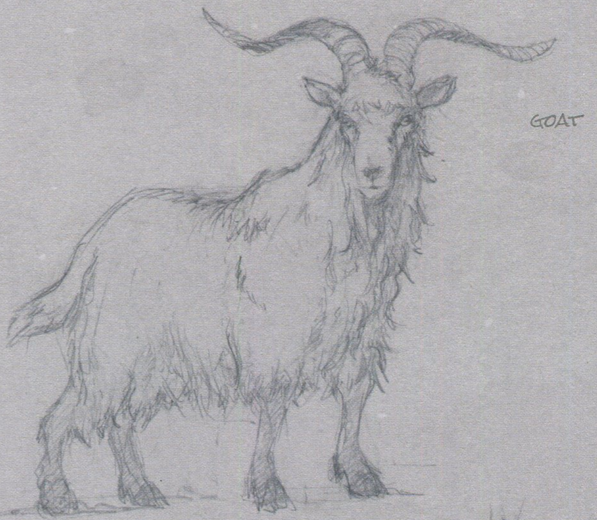
Horns are a very important part of the design because they add character and rhythm to the head. There are many kinds of goats and lots of different horn shapes. It is important to look at how they are formed and curl in order to create interesting shapes on my faun. To give the faun a more mythical and mysterious feel, I consider drawing the horns branching out, similar to a deer's antlers or the branches of a tree.

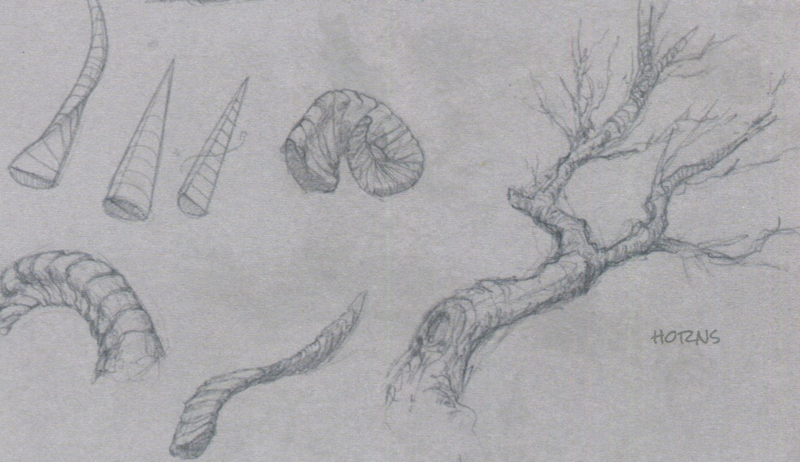
Humans

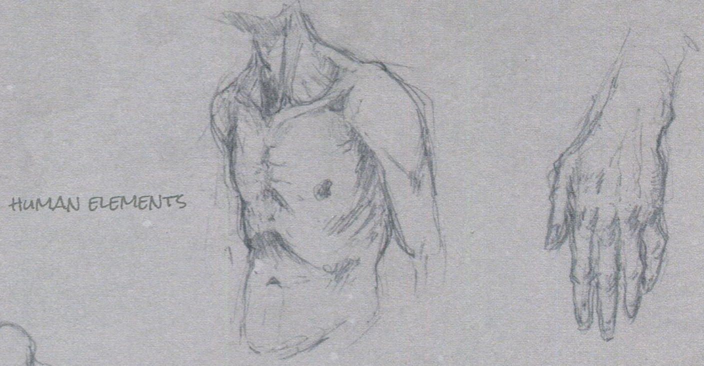
It is important to not only study the human form visually but to understand it mechanically – how bodies move and work. Knowing how a human is put together is a vital part of any character study. As fauns are often ancient creatures, it will be useful for me to study slender and aged bodies. I find studying the anatomy of old people, especially their hands, fascinating because they are very expressive and have a lot of character.

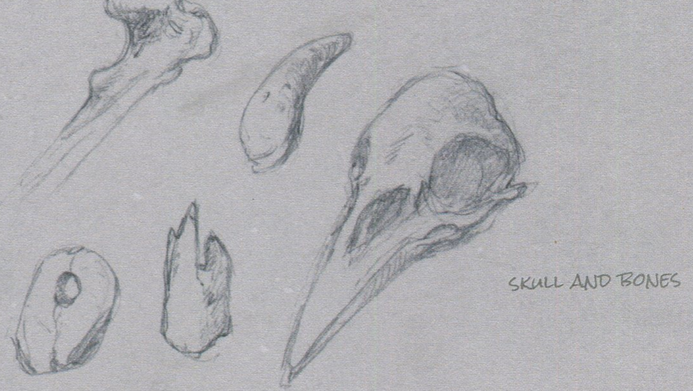
Bones

I also study different objects such as bird skulls, small bones, and pebbles to use as ornaments and jewelry. I want the faun to have these cultural elements to suggest that it is part of a tribe. As a woodland creature it makes sense that the faun would use things found littered around the forest floor to make ritualistic ornaments, rather than using metal and other human-made materials.









Hooves

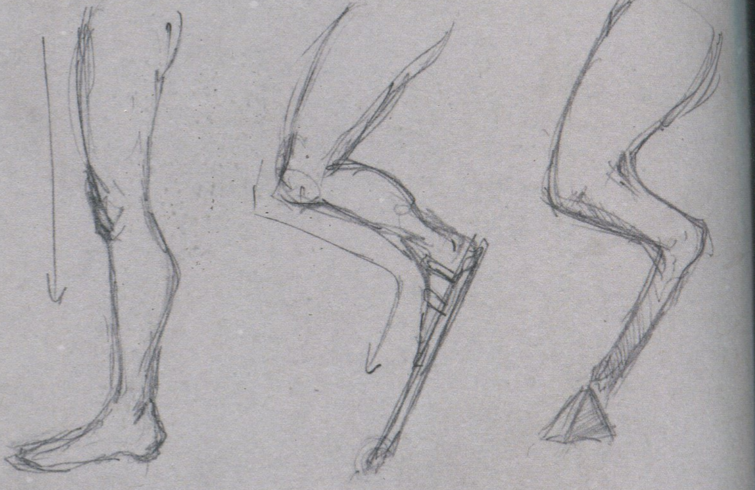
Before you draw hooves it is important to think of them as the shoes of a digitigrade leg, or as a reinforcement of the tip of the faun's toes. Digitigrade legs have very long feet and carry all of the creature's weight on the toes. Many mammals, such as goats, cats, and dogs, have digitigrade legs. In the case of goats and other ungulates (members of a large mammalian family, most of which have hooves), the toes have merged together to become hooves. This is for both strength and protection.

To help myself more accurately draw digitigrade legs, I start by drawing a human leg, then drawing that same leg bent at the knee with the toes pointing down at roughly a 45° angle. I extend the foot to the ground as if the leg is on stilts and draw a small pyramid to represent the hoof. I now have a simple digitigrade leg.

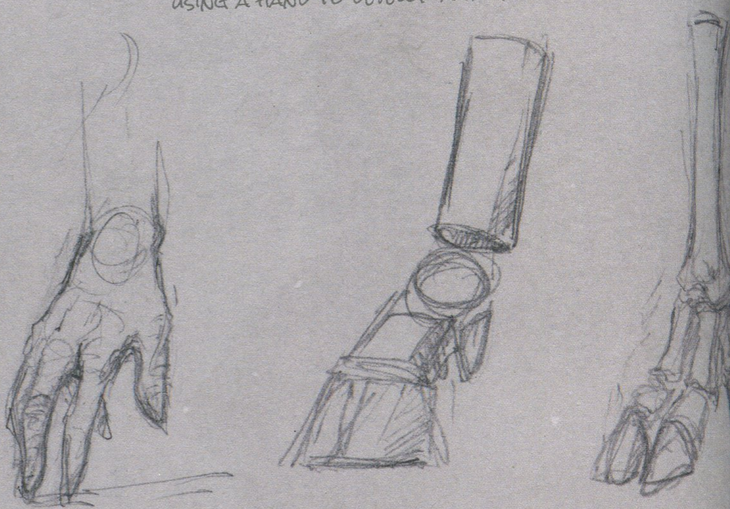
To understand the anatomy of other creatures it is always useful to compare their morphology and function to your own structures; for the anatomy of a goat hoof I try to think of it as a hand. I put the tips of my index, middle, and ring fingers on my desk, making sure the pinky finger and thumb do not touch the table but hang down; now I have a starting point for a hoof. The top of the pyramid from the previous step will be the wrist and the three fingers touching the table will be the large bones of the hoof. The thumb and little finger need to be shortened to represent the two dew claws.

Now that I have the main structure of the hooves, it is time to dress them and add skin and fur. It is important to remember that hooves are mainly bone structures and have almost no muscular volume on them. To accurately draw hooves you need to understand how they work. I recommend watching videos of goats running and leaping, or you could try to run on tiptoes to really get a feel for it – the things you draw best are the things you understand the most.

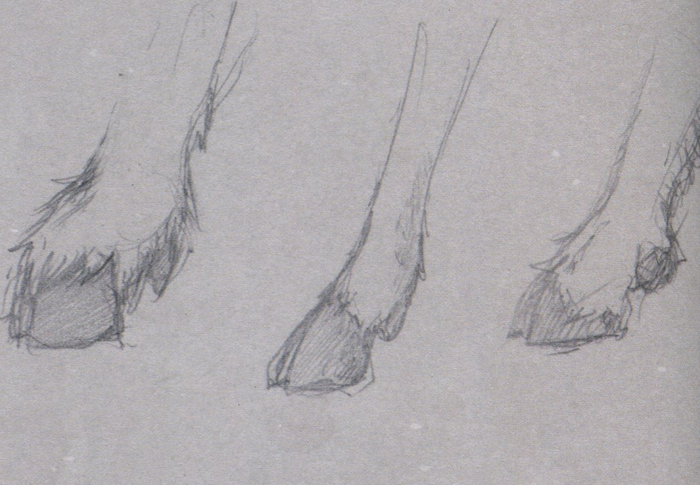
FROM HUMAN TO DIGITIGRADE



USING A HAND TO DEVELOP A HOOF



ADDING SKIN AND FUR

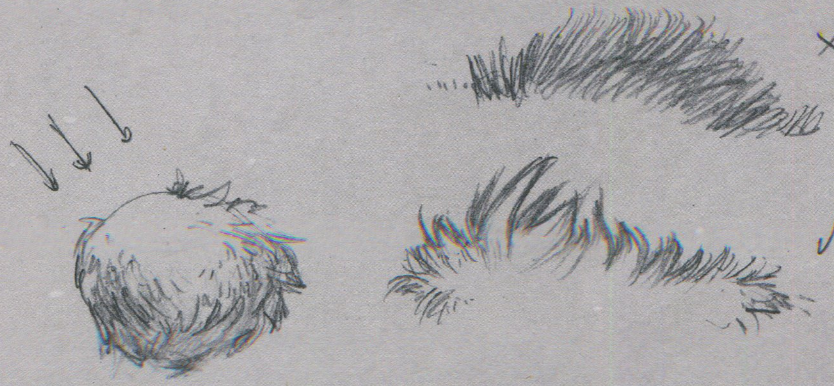


wing hair or fur, simple is always
should not draw *every single strand;*
rally falls together in locks so you
aw it this way. There are many ways
g it and you have to practice them
find the one that works best for
ting is also important; the area with
detail should be where the light and
blend together.

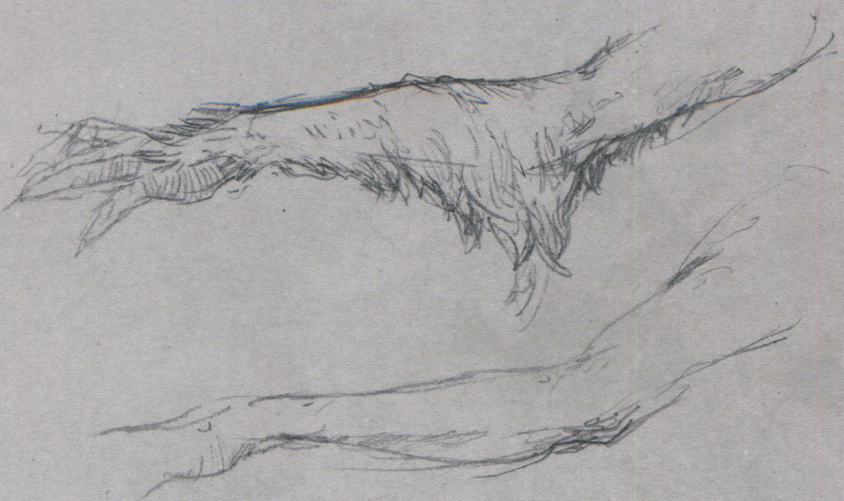
ng good hairy creatures means you
to draw fur of different lengths, and
tions between fur lengths should
except in certain points such as the
forehead, where hairs may grow
e quickly, like human hair. It is also
to know what is underneath the fur,
the creature could end up looking
irball. To practice I draw an arm or
ut hair, then establish at least three
hair of different lengths. Finally I fill
nd carefully blend each length into
avoid obvious jumps from one zone

ny other hanging element, will
position depending on gravity, the
of the figure, and other elements
nd. It helps to know exactly where
ws from and which direction it will
or pulled to. A good way to practice
applying it to a character is to draw
res and cover them with different
ir – straight or curly, short or longer.
nd with the fur on these to see how it
n I translate it to my creature.

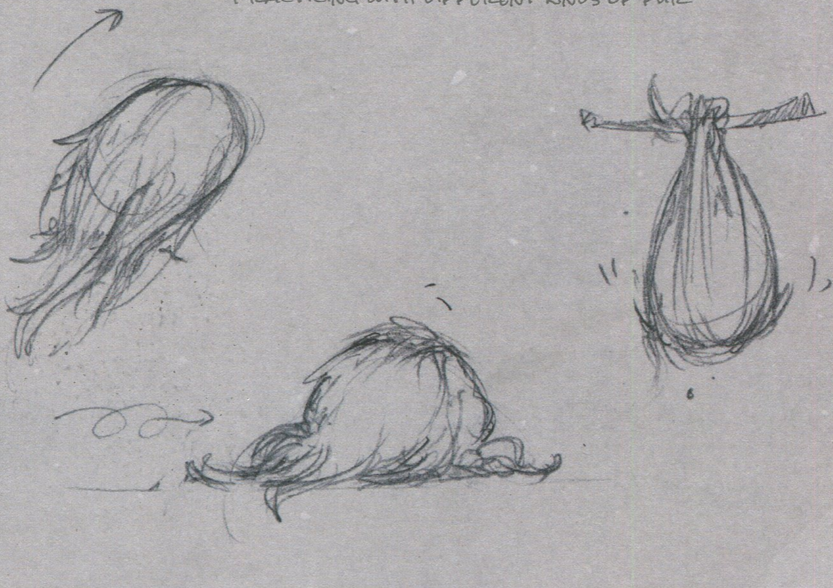
STUDYING THE EFFECT OF LIGHT ON FUR



SKETCHING FUR OF DIFFERENT LENGTHS



PRACTICING WITH DIFFERENT KINDS OF FUR



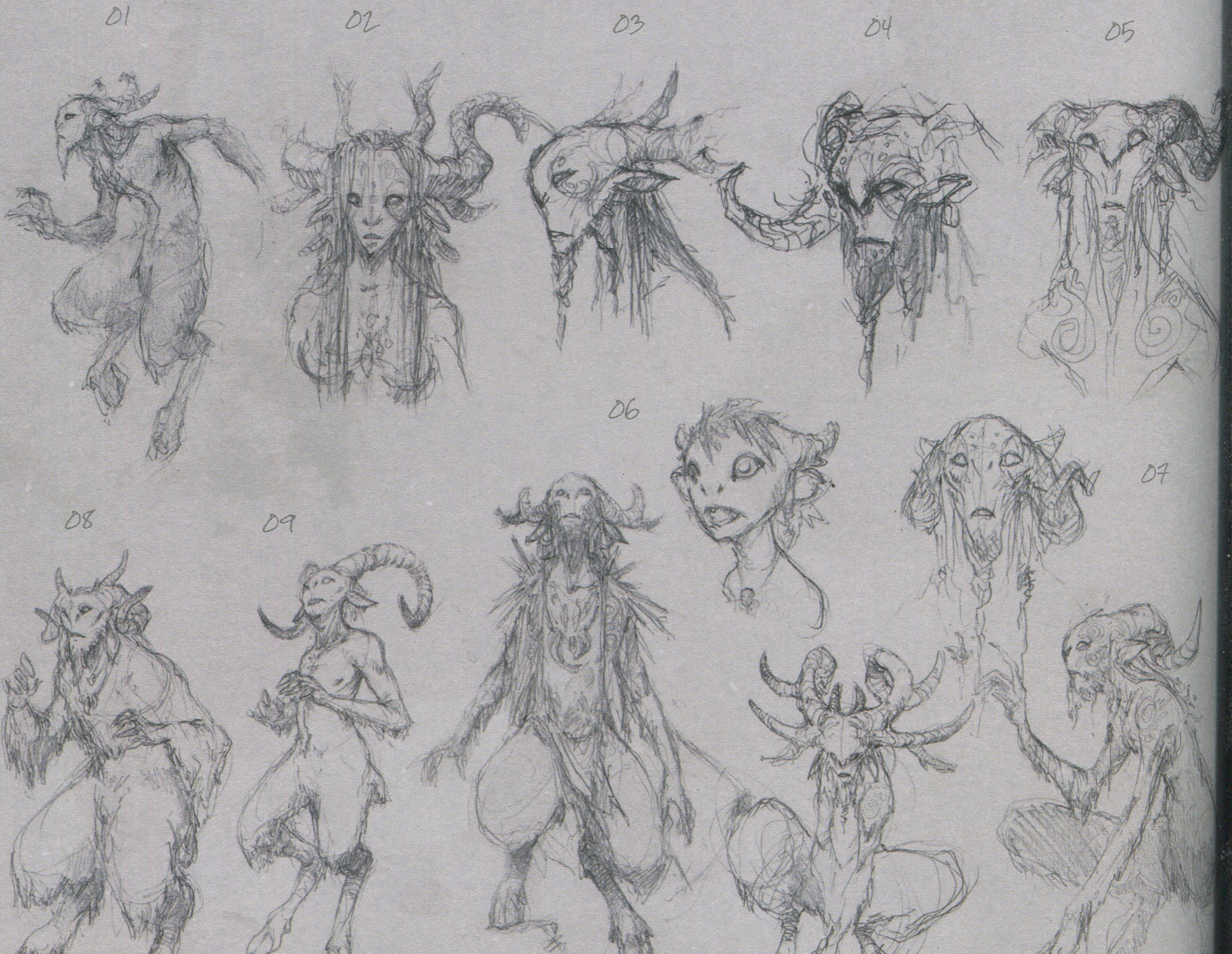
• DESIGN PROCESS •

Thumbnails

I wanted to explore different ways of mixing the various elements including the length of the limbs, the amount of hair, and body proportions. One area that I wanted to explore in particular – in part because it is the main source of expression and attitude – was the face, and by extension the horns. It was very important to see how animal and human parts could be mixed together in unobvious and interesting ways to create the look and feel needed, and also to see how the different expressions would look against branching horns. Even though I liked the idea of tree-like branches for horns, the simpler, curved horns seemed to work better.

I found it useful to think of key adjectives to explore different variations and style choices. These included a young faun, an evil faun, and an ancient tree-like faun. This is a great way to change an approach from one sketch to another to ensure you try the best ideas possible.

Some of the sketches you can see belo quick, rough ones, where I just drew dow basic information, while others took a longer and are more detailed. I tried to ex various body shapes as well as different designs. All the different looks and styles part of the process that helps me to b understand the subject; they demonst which ideas and elements work toge well and those that are wrong or hamper overall design.



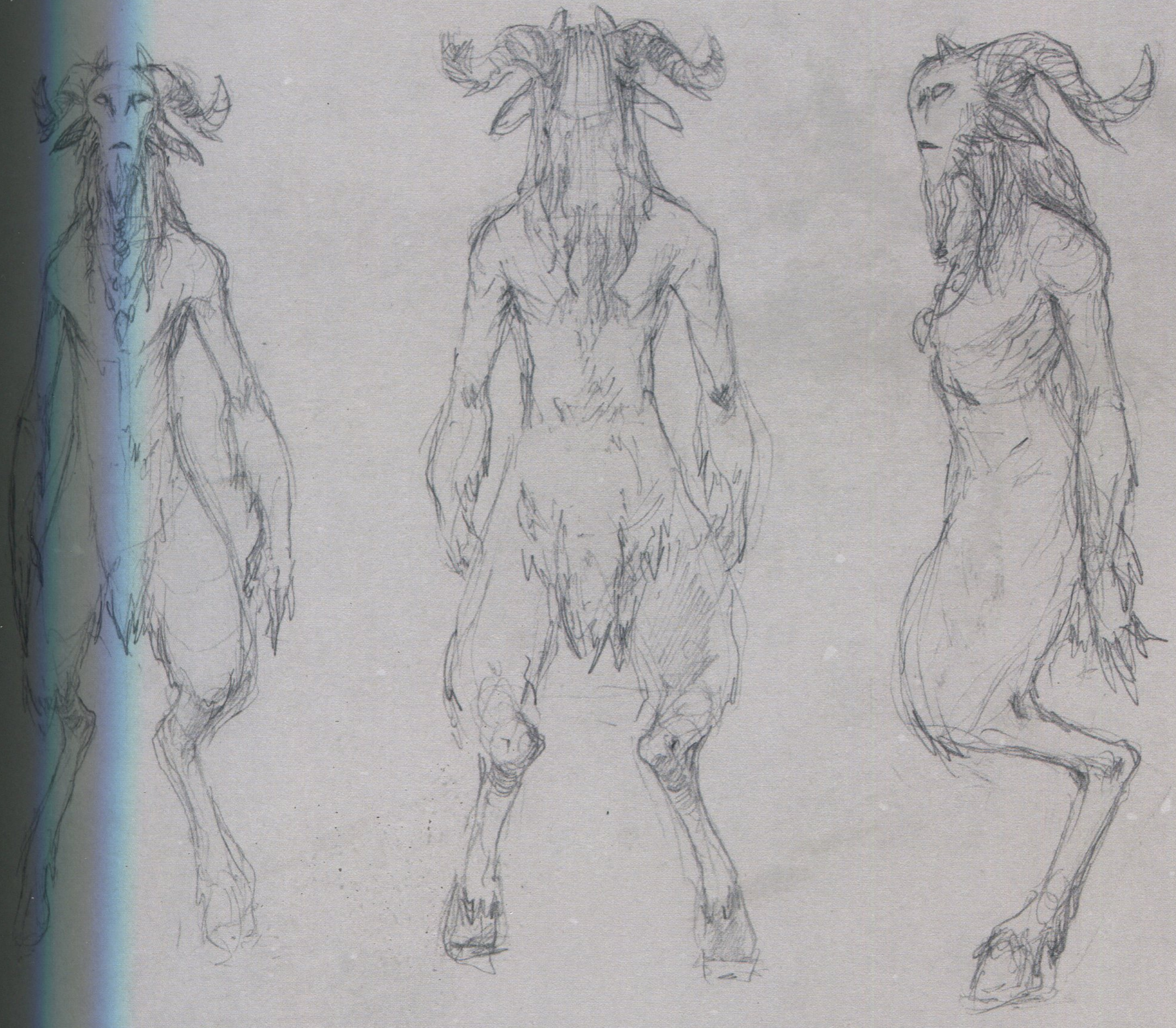
Further exploration

Using the simpler thumbnails as a starting point, I decided to make a younger, more agile faun – still slender and wise looking but not so aged that its mobility is affected.

From the front you can see the defined silhouette of the horns and the facial features. In order to balance the body and give the faun a more natural stance, I turned the ankles in and the knees and hooves out slightly. The thighs look strong, and with its lean physique I imagine it to be able to run through forests at great speeds.

Drawing the faun from behind raised questions that I had not considered before, such as whether the faun should have a tail or not. I decided to include a tail because it works well as part of the overall design and creates contrast between the skinny torso and hairy upper legs. I carried the beard shape round to the back as a sort of mane, enhancing the tribal look.

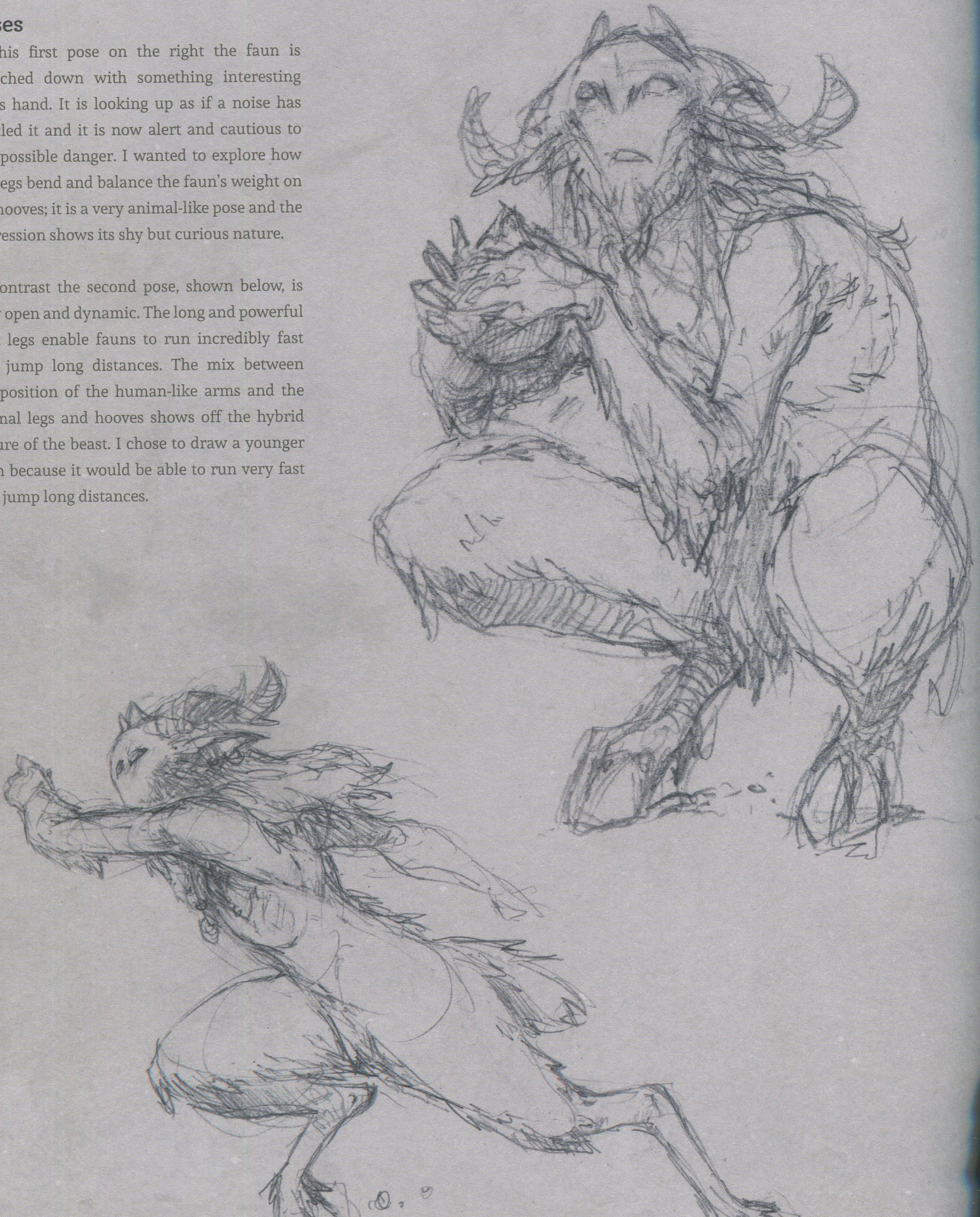
The main problem with drawing the faun from the side is one of balance. It was very important that I worked this out in order to add believability and realism to the design. Even though I would be unlikely to draw a completely static and stiff creature like this as a final design, it does serve the purpose of making sure that the goat legs are correct and defining the direction and curl of the horns.



Poses

In this first pose on the right the faun is crouched down with something interesting in its hand. It is looking up as if a noise has startled it and it is now alert and cautious to any possible danger. I wanted to explore how the legs bend and balance the faun's weight on the hooves; it is a very animal-like pose and the expression shows its shy but curious nature.

In contrast the second pose, shown below, is very open and dynamic. The long and powerful goat legs enable fauns to run incredibly fast and jump long distances. The mix between the position of the human-like arms and the animal legs and hooves shows off the hybrid nature of the beast. I chose to draw a younger faun because it would be able to run very fast and jump long distances.



• SUBSPECIES •

Goatman

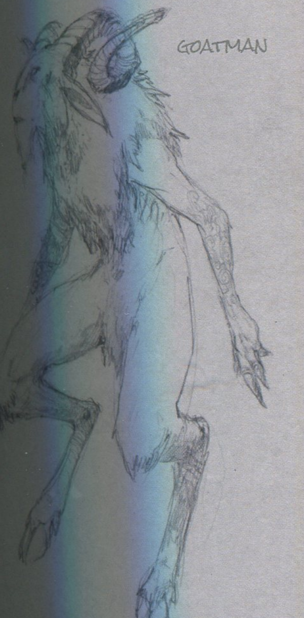
This evil creature is far less intelligent and much more violent than its shy forest-dwelling brethren. Goatmen are more animalistic in both appearance and nature. They are often associated with dark rituals and evil witchcraft, although they are unable to wield magic for themselves. Shunned by the woodland fauns, they are forced to live in big underground caves and only leave to hunt at night; this they are very, very good at, especially when there is a human child nearby.

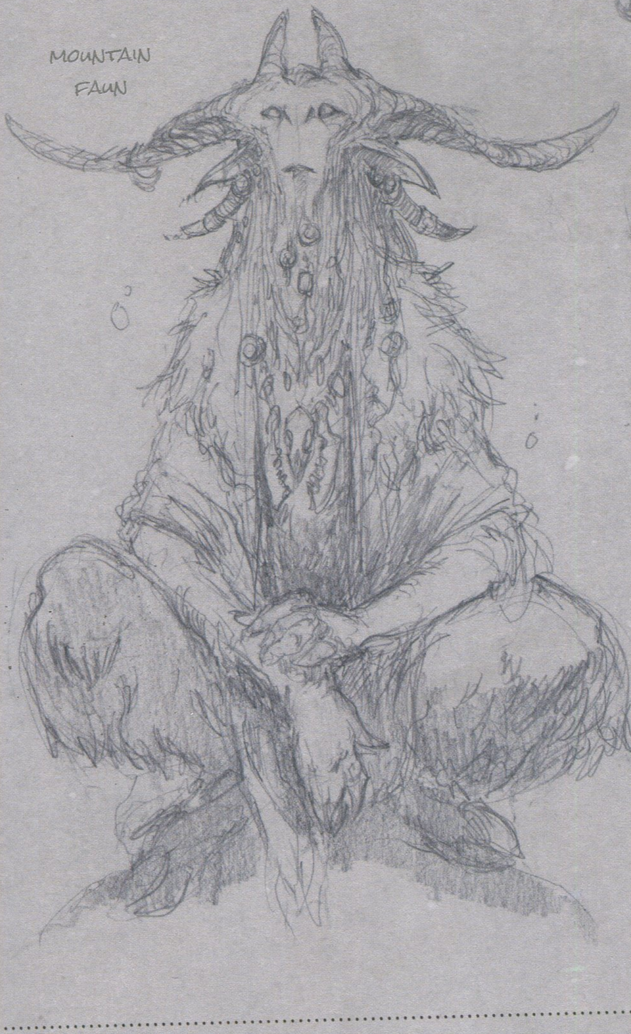
Mountain faun

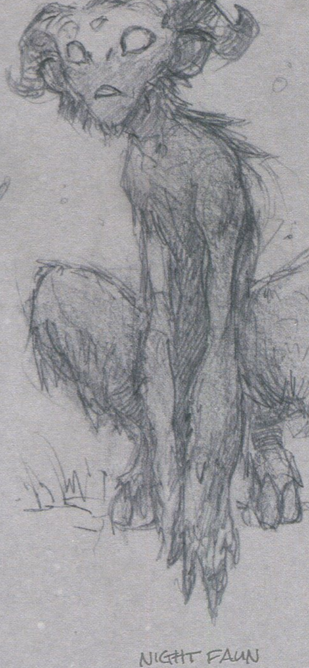
It is said that at the top of the world's highest mountains you can find caves where the ancient and wise mountain fauns live. The expedition there is arduous and is a journey of the soul as well as the body. If you make it to the peaks of these mountains and find yourself before these mysterious creatures you will discover all the answers you seek. Many people have attempted this grueling journey but few make it, and even fewer make it back to share their new-found knowledge.

Night faun

The night faun is one of the purest and most child-like of all the spirits of the forest; it is a joyful and mischievous little creature that comes out after sunset. Its dark blue skin and thick fur means it is extremely difficult to spot one unless it turns its large, bright moon-shaped eyes in your direction. It is said that night fauns will only make themselves known to children and those of pure heart. They make their homes near lakes, springs, and other sources of water and magic.

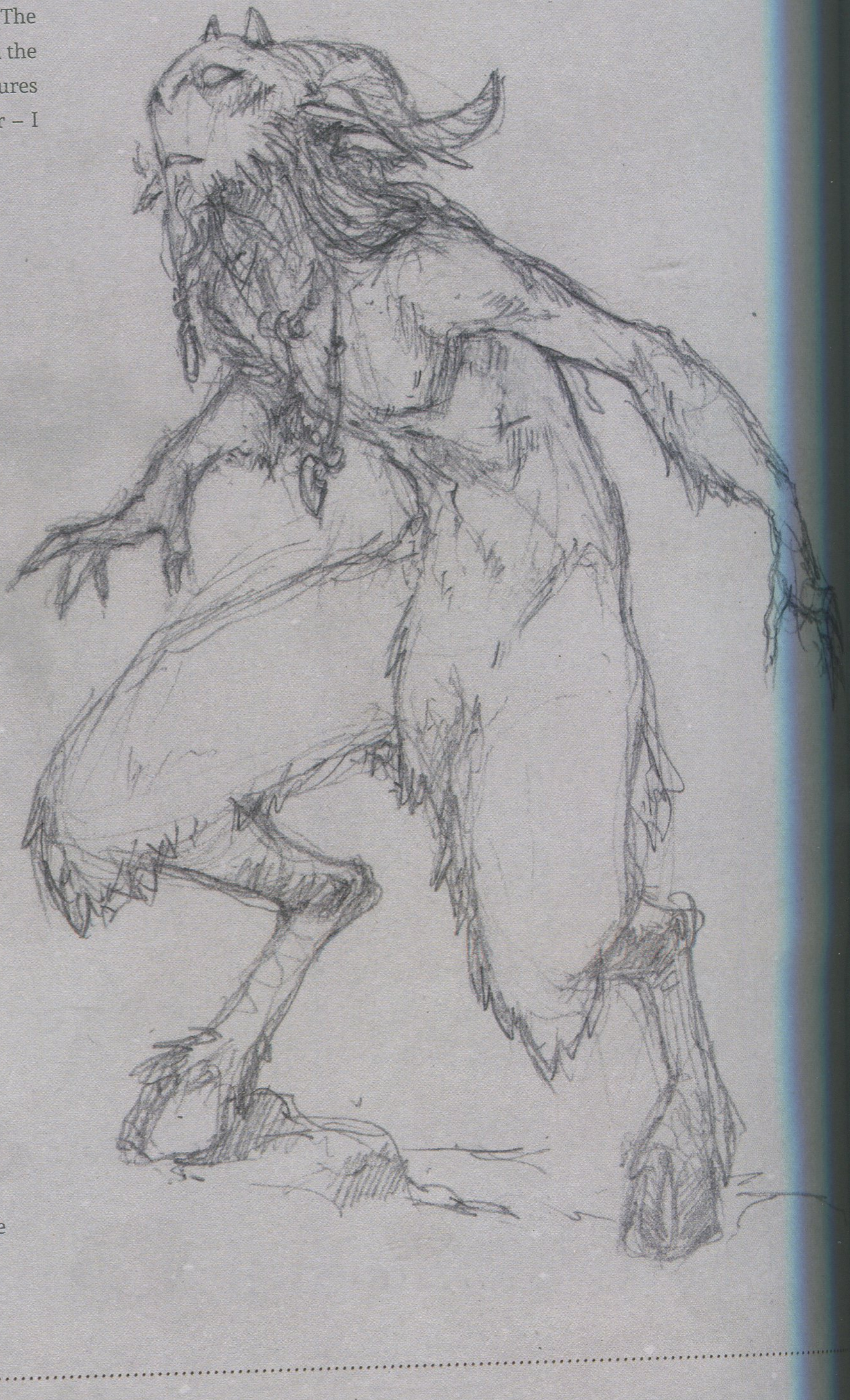






• FINAL DESIGN •

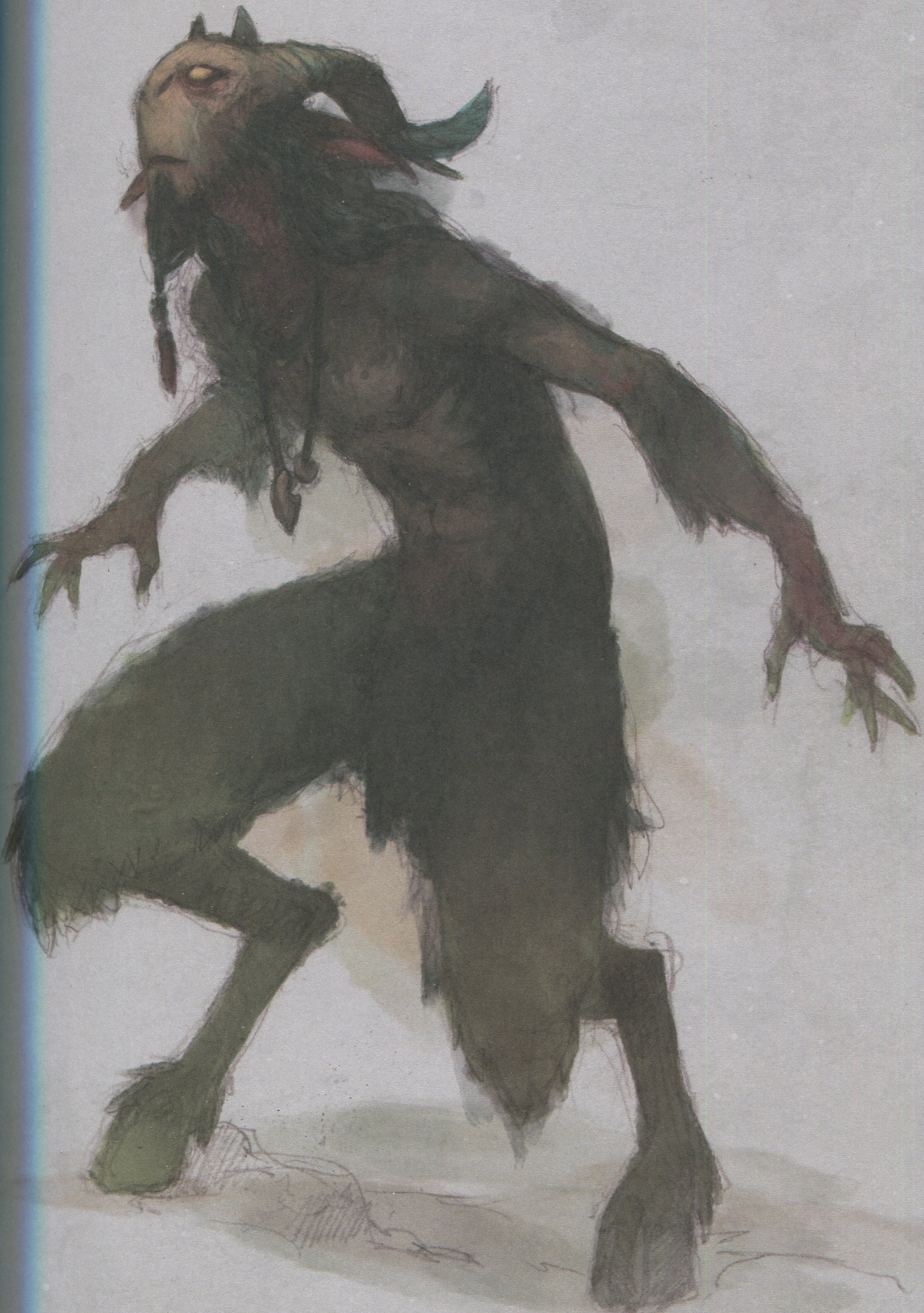
In the final design the faun has ritual tribal elements hanging from his neck to give him a look of intelligence and culture. This is another pose that evokes the feeling that the faun has been stopped in its tracks as it assesses the situation for possible danger. The hooves, horns, hair, and skin colors connect the beast to nature and natural elements. It is important when designing hybrid creatures that you reduce the mixing of parts to a minimum and keep changes as subtle as possible. The finished product should be a perfect mix of one and the other and remind the viewer of both parent creatures without one being more dominant than the other – I did not want to end up with a man on goat hooves!

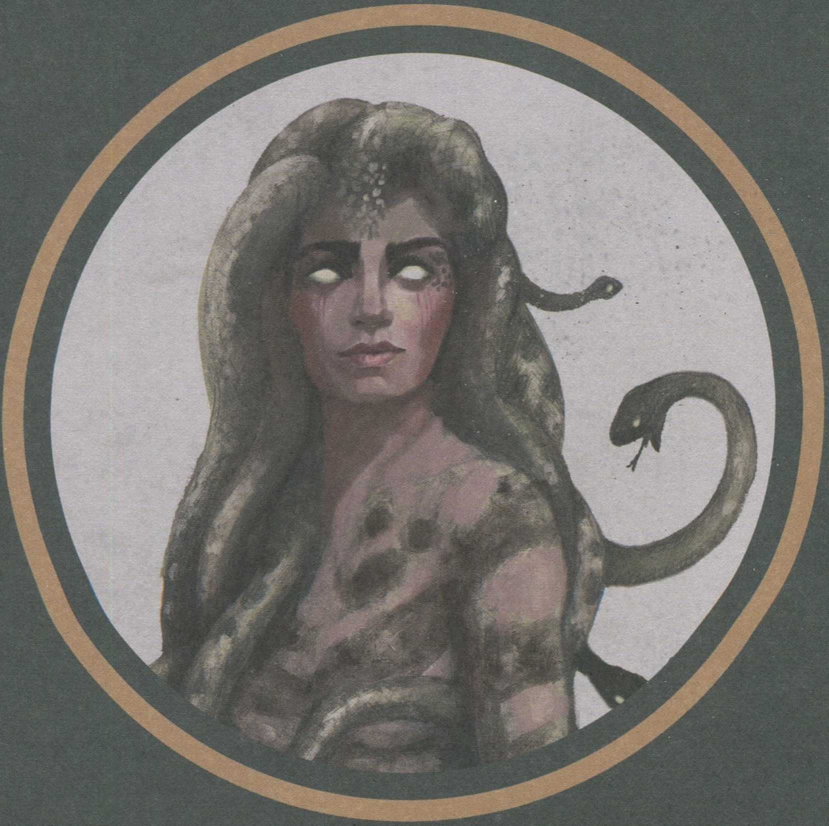


Key facts

Name: Faun
Taxonomy: Goat, human
Region: Europe
Habitat: Woodland
Mythical abilities: Spiritual connection to nature
Threat to humans: 1

Final image © Álvaro Ramírez





GORGON

The term "Gorgon" comes from the ancient Greek word *gorgós*, which means terrible or dreadful. Gorgons are found exclusively in th Mediterranean, and most commonly in the country of Greece, though they are also said to have inhabited ancient Babylon. Gorgons are femal serpentine humanoid creatures with hair consisting of living snakes and a gaze which can turn those who dare lay eyes upon them into ston *The most famous Gorgon is Lady Medusa, who was slain by the Greek hero Perseus. Less well known* are Medusa's two sisters, who carried o the species after her demise. There are different depictions of Gorgons, and *while they have the same overarching traits, there* are some visu differences. Some variations have human legs whereas others have more serpentine qualities and, not unlike the appearance of mermaids, a half-snake, half-woman. Common for them all is their vicious and mean-spirited mindset. Like snakes, some Gorgons have venomous fangs, eve though the fangs are rather useless as the gaze of a Gorgon will more than likely turn a victim to stone first. Because of this gaze, a large portion o the Gorgon population has vanished due to starvation as their prey ceased being edible after they beheld their visage.

• KIRI ØSTERGAARD LEONARD •

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• FIELD NOTES •

Snakes

Gorgons are a horrific cross between human beings and snakes, and with their hair being comprised of snakes I start my research by sketching these. I am particularly interested in the head of the snake, as this will be a key part of the Gorgon's hair. I also take note of their scales and eyes, as these provide great options for playing around with different features of the Gorgon.

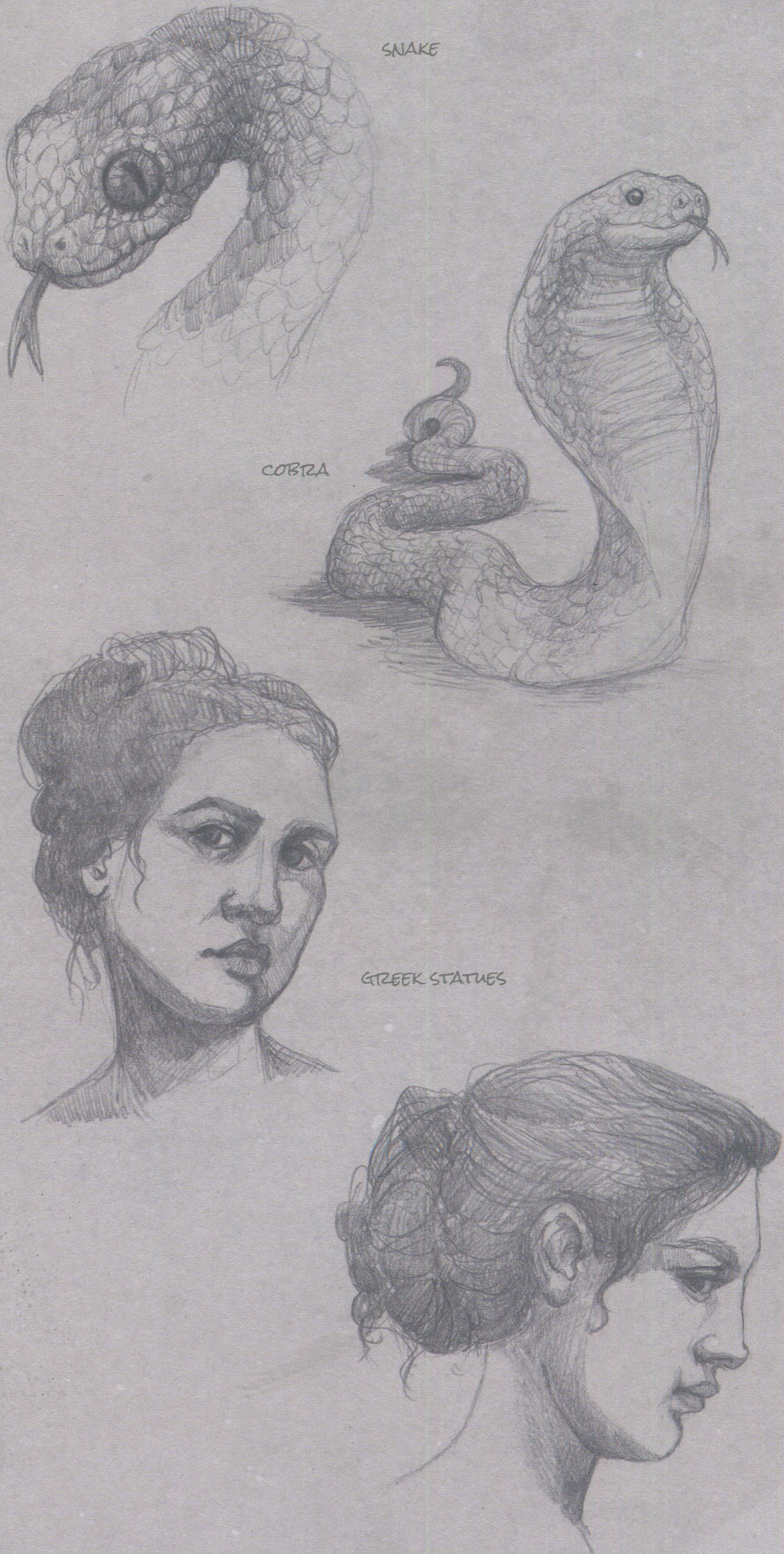
Cobras

Snakes have fascinating bodies; they are made up of pure muscle. I really want to ensure the body of the Gorgon has a similar feel and movement to that of a snake, so I carefully research the movement and structure of the body in full. I am intrigued by the cobra in particular because of its unique defensive posture; this could become an interesting shape to use in the Gorgon design.

Greek statues

For the human part of the Gorgon I research classical Greek statues. The nose plays a prominent part among the facial features and there are also some interesting hairstyles to play with. Another important feature is the strong brow and chin. The eyes are also striking, and as they perform an essential role in the story of the Gorgan I pay extra attention to them.

The classical features are particularly compelling in profile. I accentuate the nose and how it bridges into the forehead, giving her strong eyebrows. Drawing the profile view also gives me another opportunity to explore the hairstyle. This hairstyle is classical, but I am not sure it will work well when turned into a mess of angry snakes; nonetheless it gives me a good base to work from.



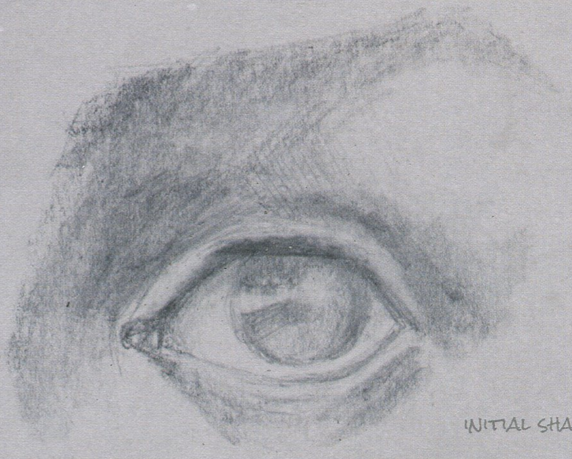
Gorgon eyes

The most popular Gorgon myth is perhaps that of Medusa fighting Perseus. Perseus is warned that her gaze will turn him to stone. This attribute makes the eyes an interesting part of the Gorgon design and one that needs to be studied more closely.

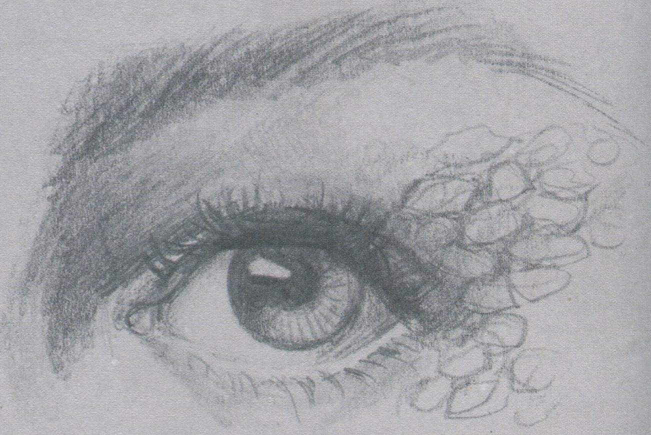
I start by blocking in the overall shape and then add some rough flat shading. I also decide where the light is going to hit the pupil. At the moment the eye doesn't have any distinctive qualities but this is only the first draft.

I now start detailing the eye more. I deepen the shadows and add hairs to the eyebrows and eyelashes, as well as begin some scale structure around the eye to hint that this is not the eye of a regular woman. Eyes can have many different shapes but always remember that the eye is an orb and the skin around it, eyelids included, wraps over the orb structure. The shading should reflect this. Likewise, the iris and pupil are a concave bowl shape so this affects how the shadows fall within the eye itself. The lightest part of the iris is opposite where the highlight hits. The highlight will be surrounded by shadow.

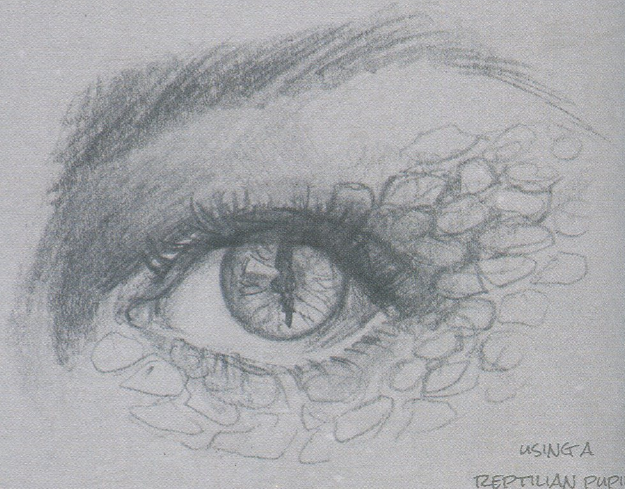
Even with the scales around the eye in the second sketch, the concept still does not look quite serpentine enough. I refer to my research on the head of the snake and decide to utilize its pupils. I also add in more of the scaly plating around the eye. When designing mythical creatures, it is always a fun challenge to see how many components from various sources you can blend together. You can achieve very unique results by doing so and it will make your final design stronger. This is why doing research is so important.



INITIAL SHAPES



ADDING DETAIL



USING A
REPTILIAN PUPIL

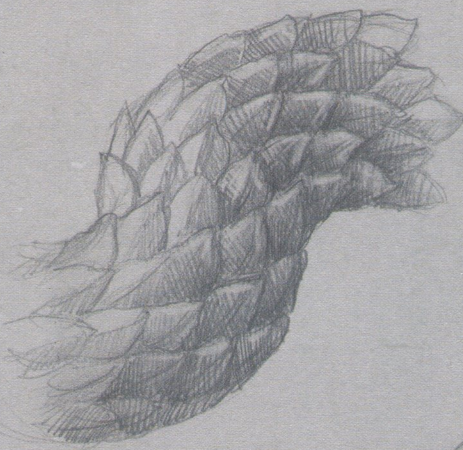
Serpentine scales

Another important part of the Gorgon is the human skin and serpent scales. I want to find out how I can best blend the two in a convincing and interesting fashion. I start by sketching a close-up study of snake scales. They overlap one another almost like armor plating. Covering the whole figure in scales would be immensely time consuming and provide too much detail, taking away from the overall image. The trick here is going to be how to find a good balance that suggests scales while also letting the drawing breathe.

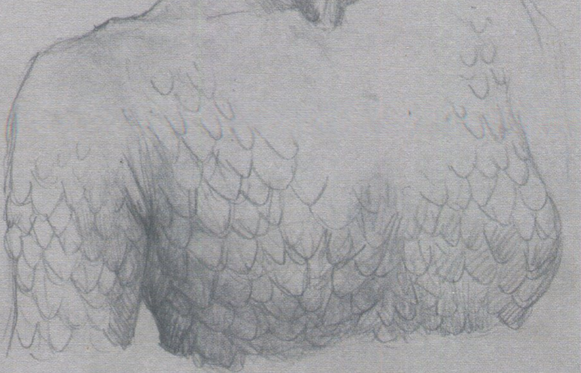
I sketch the torso of a woman and begin playing around with the scales. While snakes have a different kind of plating on their stomach than their back, I find that the overlapping scales like those I sketched above accentuate the female form in a more natural fashion. However, the scales themselves are a little dull so perhaps some patterning is required. At this stage it is important to experiment, so I draw and erase various scale patterns multiple times. Remember that these are just studies for the final so this is your playground.

I settle on more of a full-scale cover on her torso because it gives me the option to really play around with snake patterns, which will make for a more intriguing final creature. Again, I recommend playing around with different pattern possibilities and then picking the one you find the most striking.

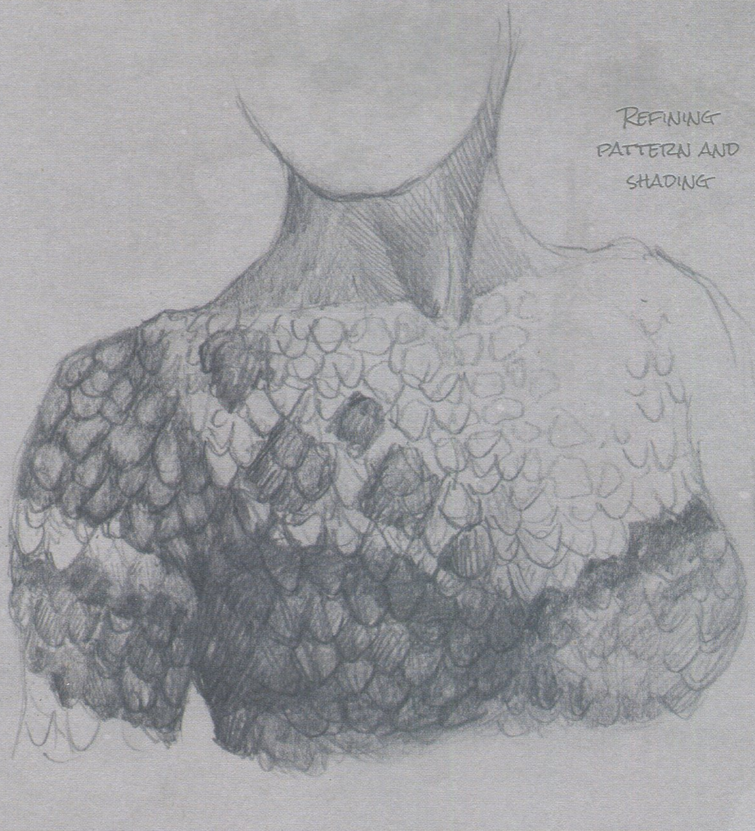
Shading scales can be tricky. Each individual scale reacts to light and shadow but the overall form is always more important; the big picture needs to read loud and clear, so that is what I focus on rather than the individual scales.



STUDYING SNAKE SCALES



ADDING SCALES TO THE TORSO



REFINING PATTERN AND SHADING

• DESIGN PROCESS •

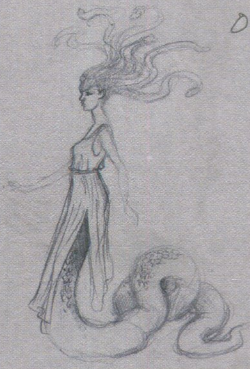
Thumbnails

My thumbnails are a series of quick, small drawings that measure about 1 × 2 inches. During this process I just tried to sketch as many ideas as possible for the creature design. The drawings are rough but they give me an idea of the overall flow of the character and are very helpful in working out various silhouettes.

I started out with some still poses. I know the composition is going to be vertical but I do not want it to be too stiff. Snakes have this wonderful writhing movement to them, so I wanted to try to capture that in some more of the concepts.

I also explored what I could do with the Gorgon's snake hair. I found that I achieved very different effects when I played with the sizes of the snakes that make up her hair. I tried a few traditional interpretations as well as some exaggerated versions with larger snakes. Each adds a different edge to the character.

I really like the idea of the Gorgon having the lower body of a snake, as it adds unique shapes and interesting balance points to the character. The hair becomes a little secondary to her lower half in those compositions, so I also explored a few versions where she has regular legs and the hair is the focus.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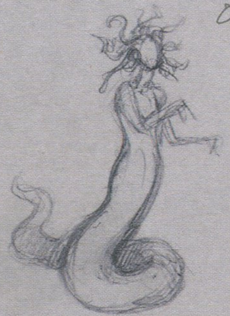
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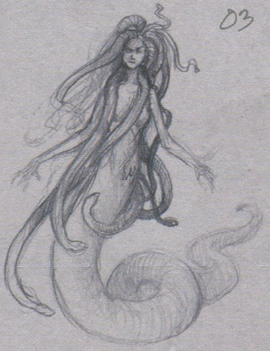
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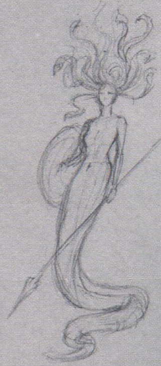
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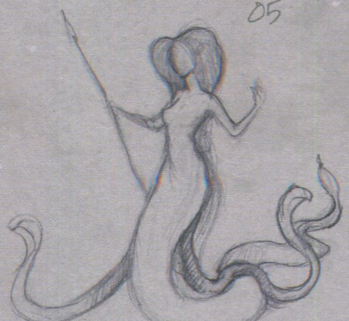
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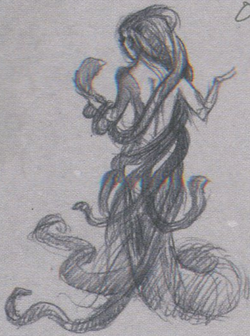
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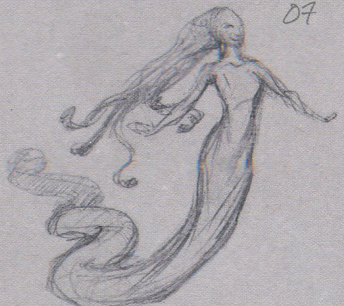
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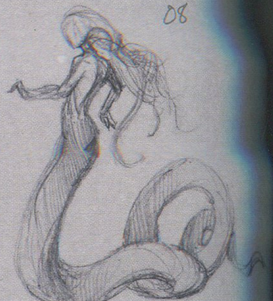
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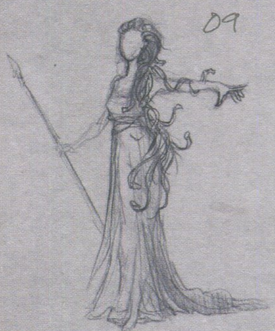
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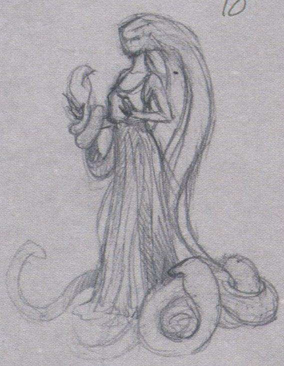
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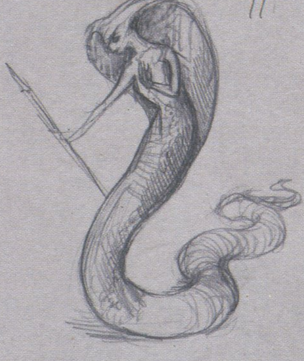
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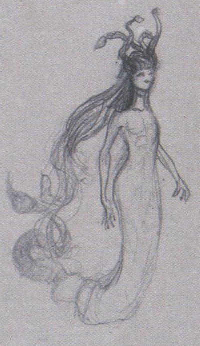
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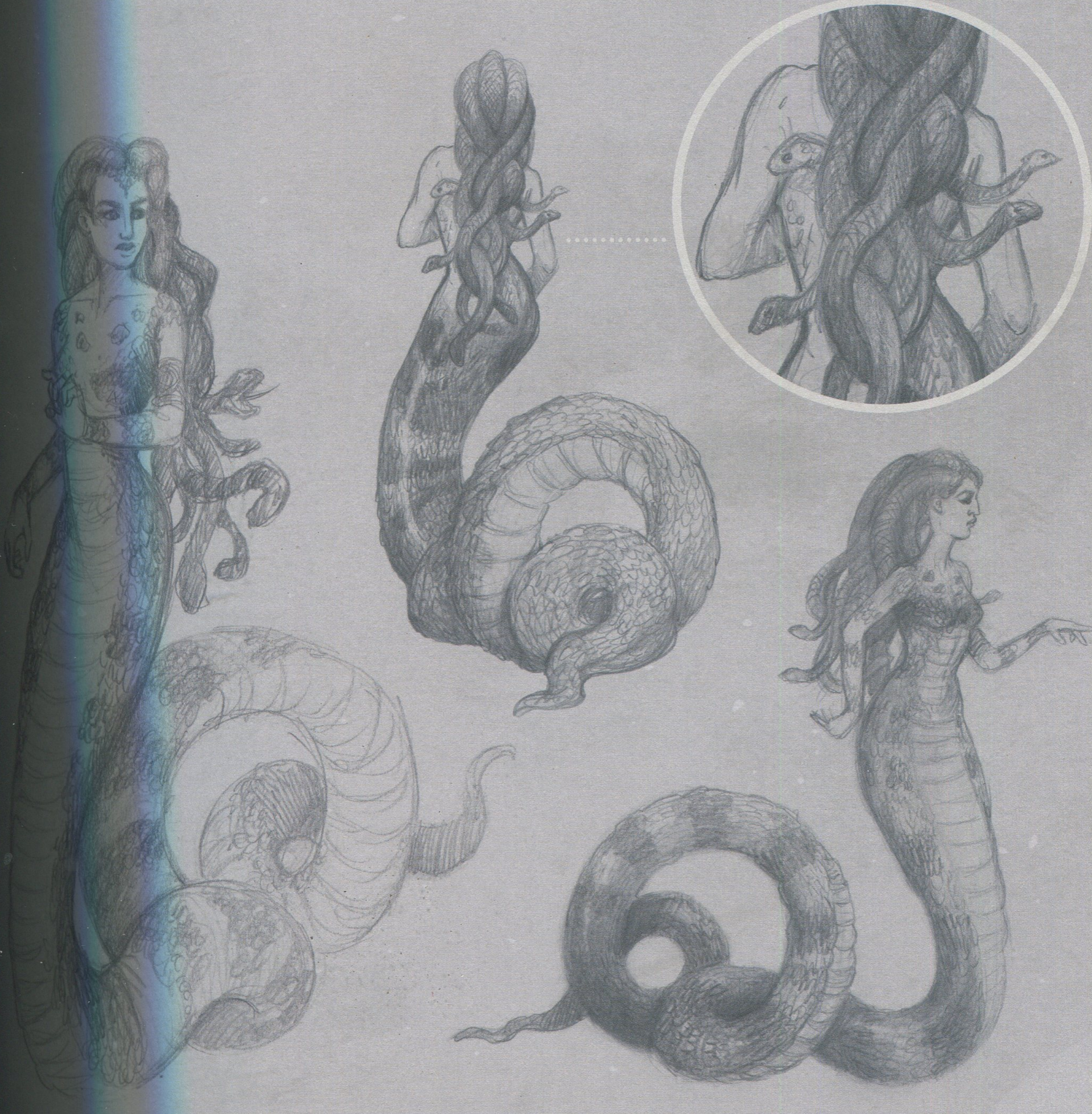
Further exploration

I settled on thumbnail 08 as it has the most interesting silhouette. I envision the hair as a blend of both small and large snakes. As I developed the concept I played with the cobra shape, accentuating wider hips. From the front you can see the grace of the serpent pose and how her body comes together in a mix of human and snake.

From behind, you can observe the coil and strength of the tail and the intricacy of her hair, which is made up of differently sized snakes. I experimented with the idea of the snakes being woven into a braid, which creates an interesting pattern. The cobra-inspired hip also reads clearly from this view and introduces an attractive feminine curve.

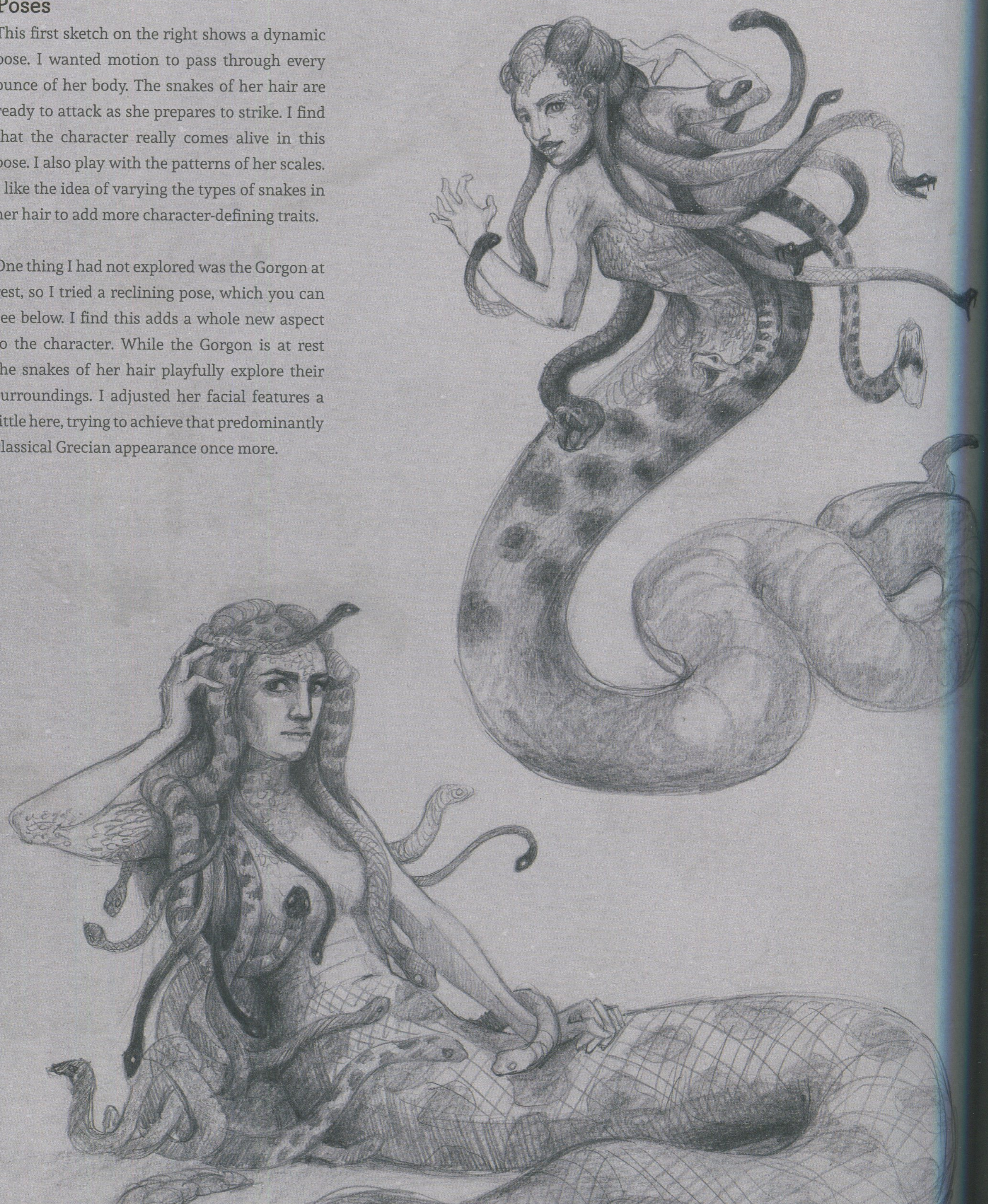
When sketching the monster from the side I wanted to explore the opposite view to that sketched in the thumbnail stage. I love the silhouette and I really liked playing with the coils of her tail. However, I find that the profile of the Gorgon becomes slightly stiff, so it is time to begin exploring some different poses for the final design.



Poses

This first sketch on the right shows a dynamic pose. I wanted motion to pass through every ounce of her body. The snakes of her hair are ready to attack as she prepares to strike. I find that the character really comes alive in this pose. I also play with the patterns of her scales. I like the idea of varying the types of snakes in her hair to add more character-defining traits.

One thing I had not explored was the Gorgon at rest, so I tried a reclining pose, which you can see below. I find this adds a whole new aspect to the character. While the Gorgon is at rest the snakes of her hair playfully explore their surroundings. I adjusted her facial features a little here, trying to achieve that predominantly classical Grecian appearance once more.



UBSPECIES •

rt Gorgon

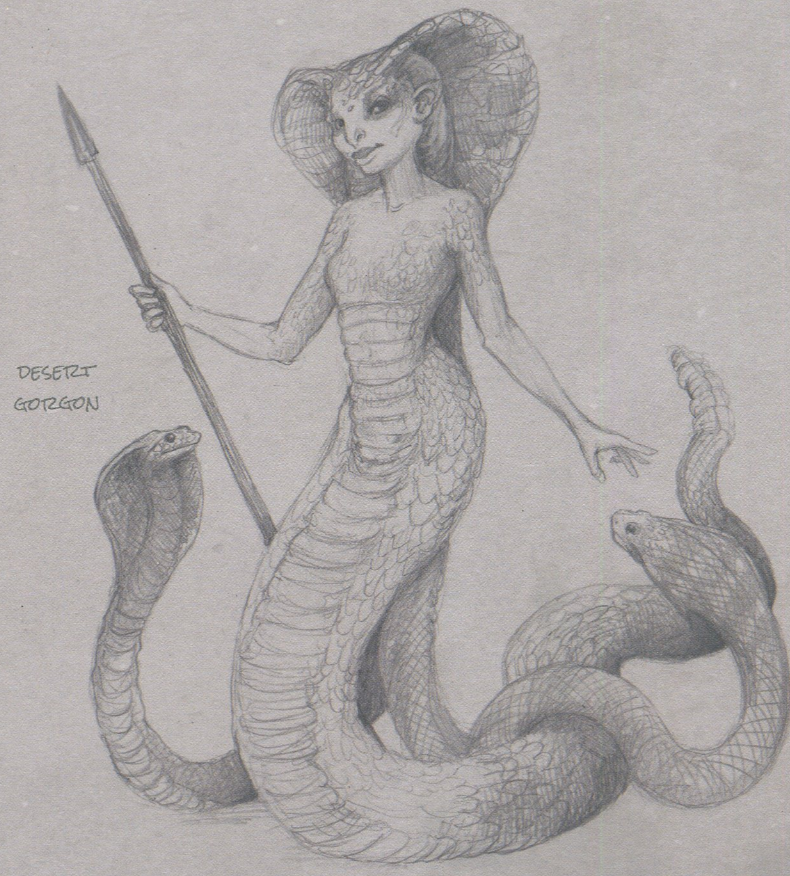
sert Gorgon has inherited many features he cobra. She is more serpentine than oid and survives well in her natural climate. With an almost ancient-an appearance, rather than a head full of s, she only has two large snakes that fall her back like massive braids. They serve hunting and guard dogs.

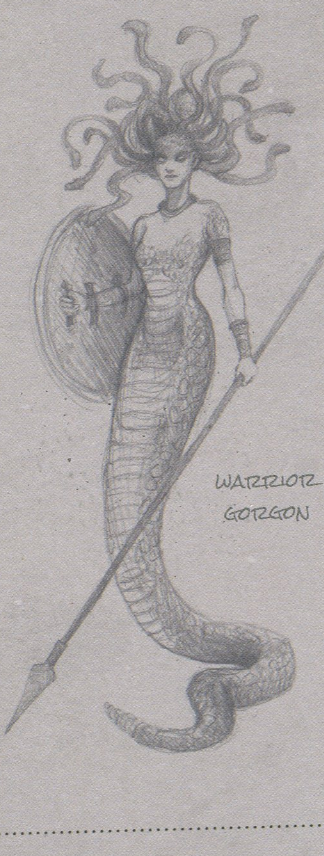
rrior Gorgon

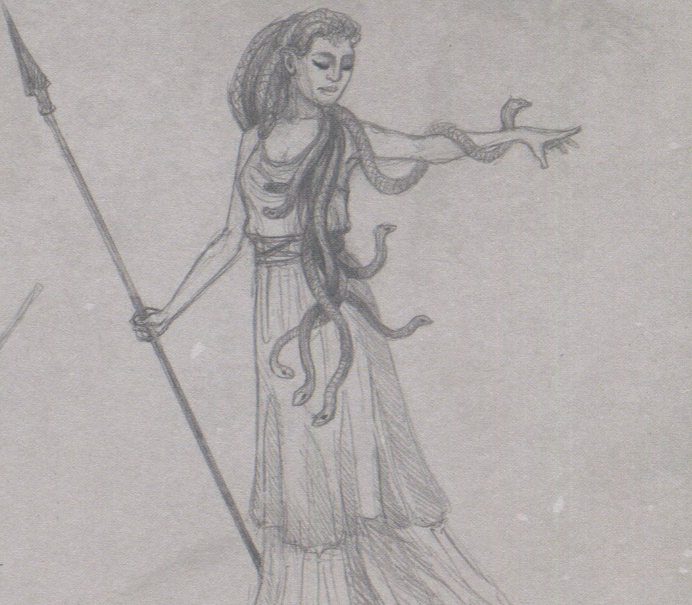
warrior Gorgon has a very straightforward compared to her relatives. She has ong no-nonsense attitude. Her hair is s of entangled snakes that crown her estic scalp, and the snakes are eager rike if anyone draws near. Her facial res and upper torso are more humanoid serpentine. The white pupils reflect the ment you have locked eyes with her and are to turn to stone. As a warrior Gorgon, only does she hold a spear like many of her hren, she also possesses a rounded shield to in defense.

lassical Gorgon

e classical Gorgon is the seductress of the ily. Her appearance has a heavy Grecian uence. Significantly more human than rpent, she is a woman who has indeed been rsed. The snakes cascade down her back e curls in a Grecian hairstyle. Instead of a rpentine lower body she has legs and carries rself with feminine grace. She has been own to blend in with human beings, longing r acceptance and only ending their lives cidentally when she inadvertently catches their eye.





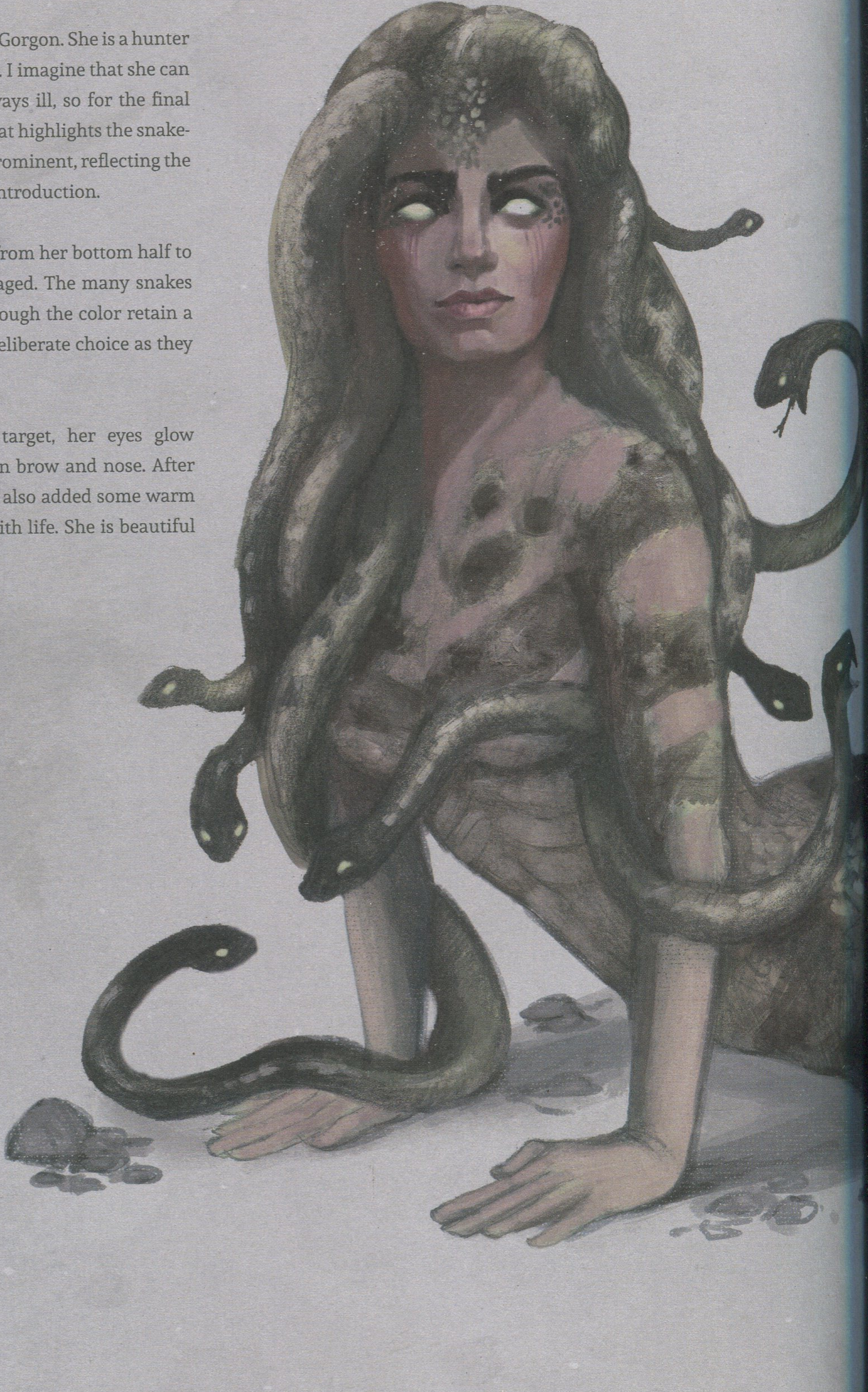


• FINAL DESIGN •

Here you can see the final design of the Gorgon. She is a hunter on the prowl and a vicious once at that. I imagine that she can be alluring but her intentions are always ill, so for the final design I settled on a serpentine pose that highlights the snake-like features. Note that her ribcage is prominent, reflecting the starvation element mentioned in the introduction.

Her scales and skin blend seamlessly from her bottom half to her torso, making her easily camouflaged. The many snakes of her hair have some variety, but through the color retain a more cohesive appearance. This is a deliberate choice as they are all part of one being.

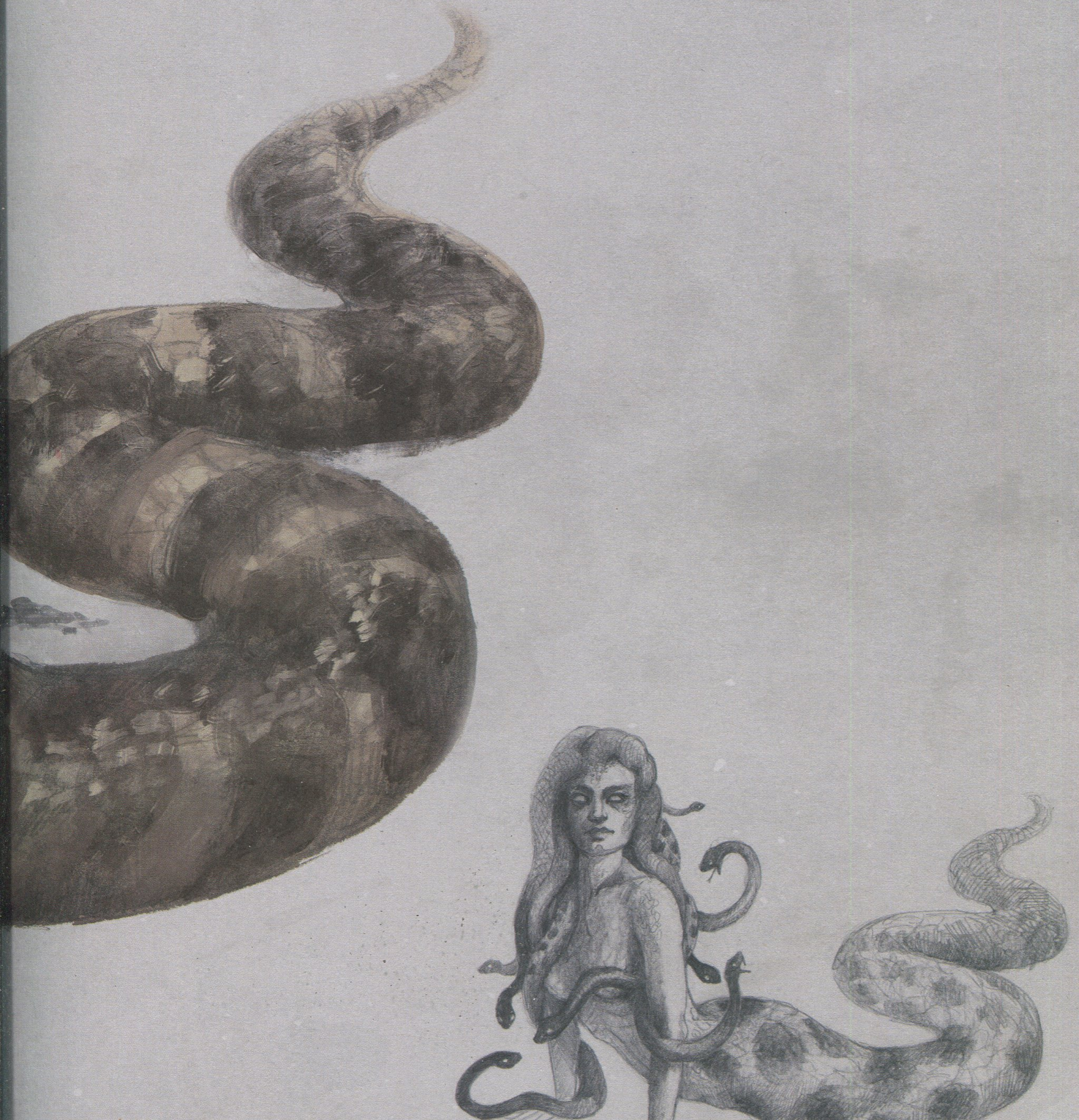
Having just locked eyes with her target, her eyes glow ominously beneath the classic Grecian brow and nose. After trying out a few color combinations I also added some warm tones to her face to make her flush with life. She is beautiful yet deadly.

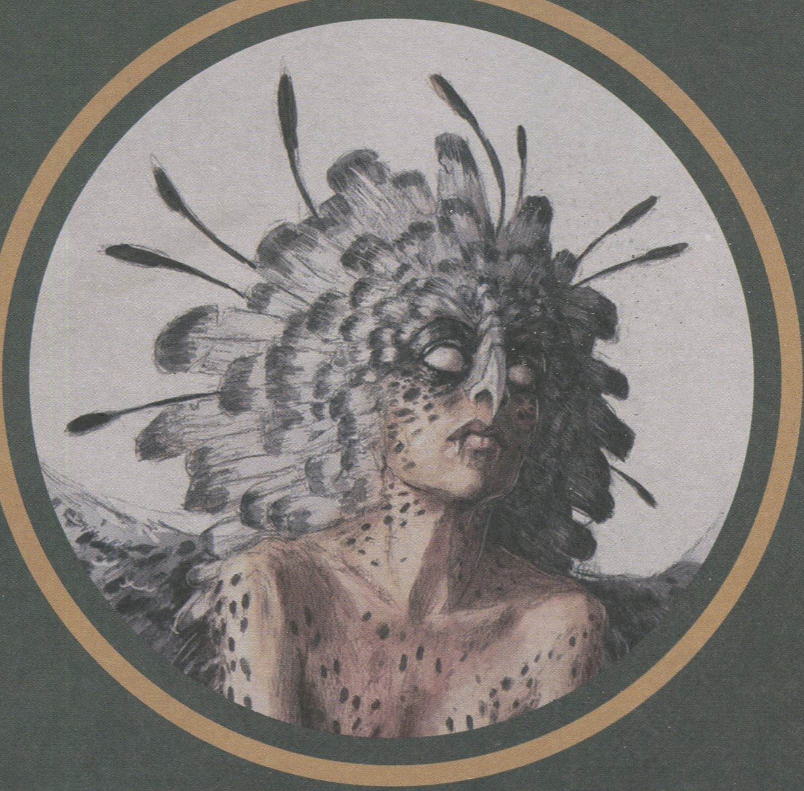


Key facts

Name: Gorgon
Taxonomy: Snake, human
Region: Greece
Habitat: Mediterranean
Mythical abilities: Petrifaction
Threat to humans: 4

Final image © Kiri Østergaard Leonard





• HARPY •

A harpy is a wind demon that takes the form of a bird, with the face and body of a woman. Plagued by an insatiable hunger, harpies are known as Zeus's dogs because he once used them to punish Phineus, the king of Thrace, for divulging the secrets of the gods; every time Phineus tried to eat, the harpies would swoop in to steal the food away from him. They are also said to carry evildoers down to the underworld for punishment. According to Dante, they inhabit the seventh circle of Hell to torment people who take their own lives. As well as being clever and cunning, harpies are incredibly vicious and cruel, often torturing their captives. Their arrival is announced by violent gusts of winds and strange screeches. Harpies are mainly found in and around the Mediterranean but have been spotted in uninhabited areas throughout Europe.

• TOMEK LAREK •

Illustrator, concept artist, & 2D game artist • tomeklarek.artstation.com

• FIELD NOTES •

Raptor facial features

In Greek mythology, harpies were generally described as being a bird with the face of a woman, so I study eagles to begin with; their raptor features lend themselves well to the ferocious nature of these winged demons. The curved shape of the beak, the deep set eyes, and the surrounding feathers pose an interesting challenge. The bone structure is completely different to that of a human so I will need to consider how I connect the two components.

Plumage

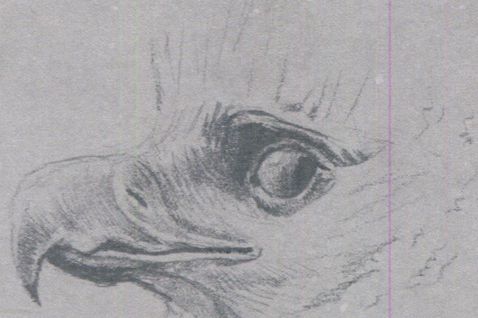
Plumage will be an important part of the harpy so I look at the American harpy eagle (named after the mythical creature). I find the shape and placement of the feathers on this eagle's head very interesting. They have a distinctive double crest of feathers that fan out when alarmed. They also have smaller feathers that frame the face and help with hearing. I want to use these feathers to inform my harpy design.

Talons

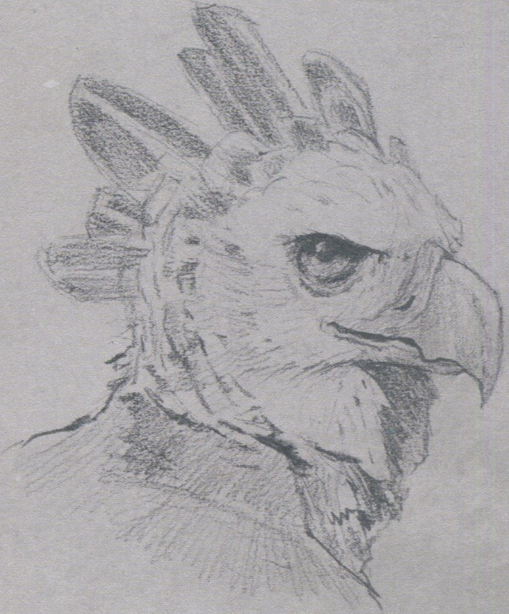
I look closely at the talons of the harpy eagle, which are the largest of any living eagle. These will add character and help to highlight the harpy's demonic and aggressive nature (I may use them for both the hands and feet in my design). The raptor talons are perfect for catching and subduing prey. They can reach up to thirteen centimeters, which is longer than the claws of a grizzly bear. The eagle's feet are covered in scaly skin, which looks very reptilian and will work well to further remove my design from human qualities.

Venetian carnival masks

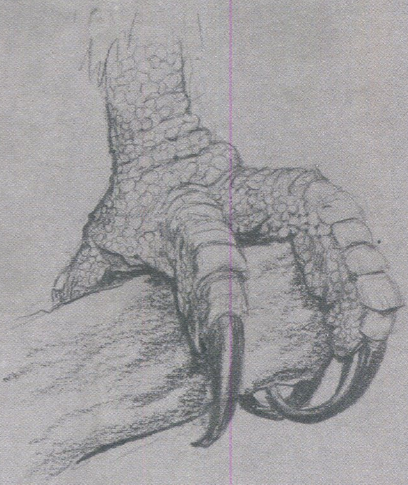
I also explore Venetian carnival masks as I hope that this will be the answer to connecting the bird and human features together in a convincing manner. I think the mask will help me to bring together the bird's beak and the round shape of the female head. I look for suitable examples that will work well. I want the arrangement of the feathers to correspond as closely as possible to the plumage of the harpy eagle.



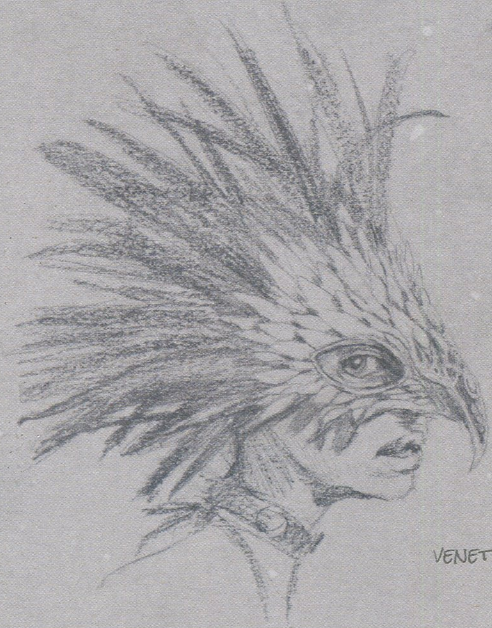
EAGLE FACE



HARPY EAGLE PLUMAGE



HARPY EAGLE TALONS



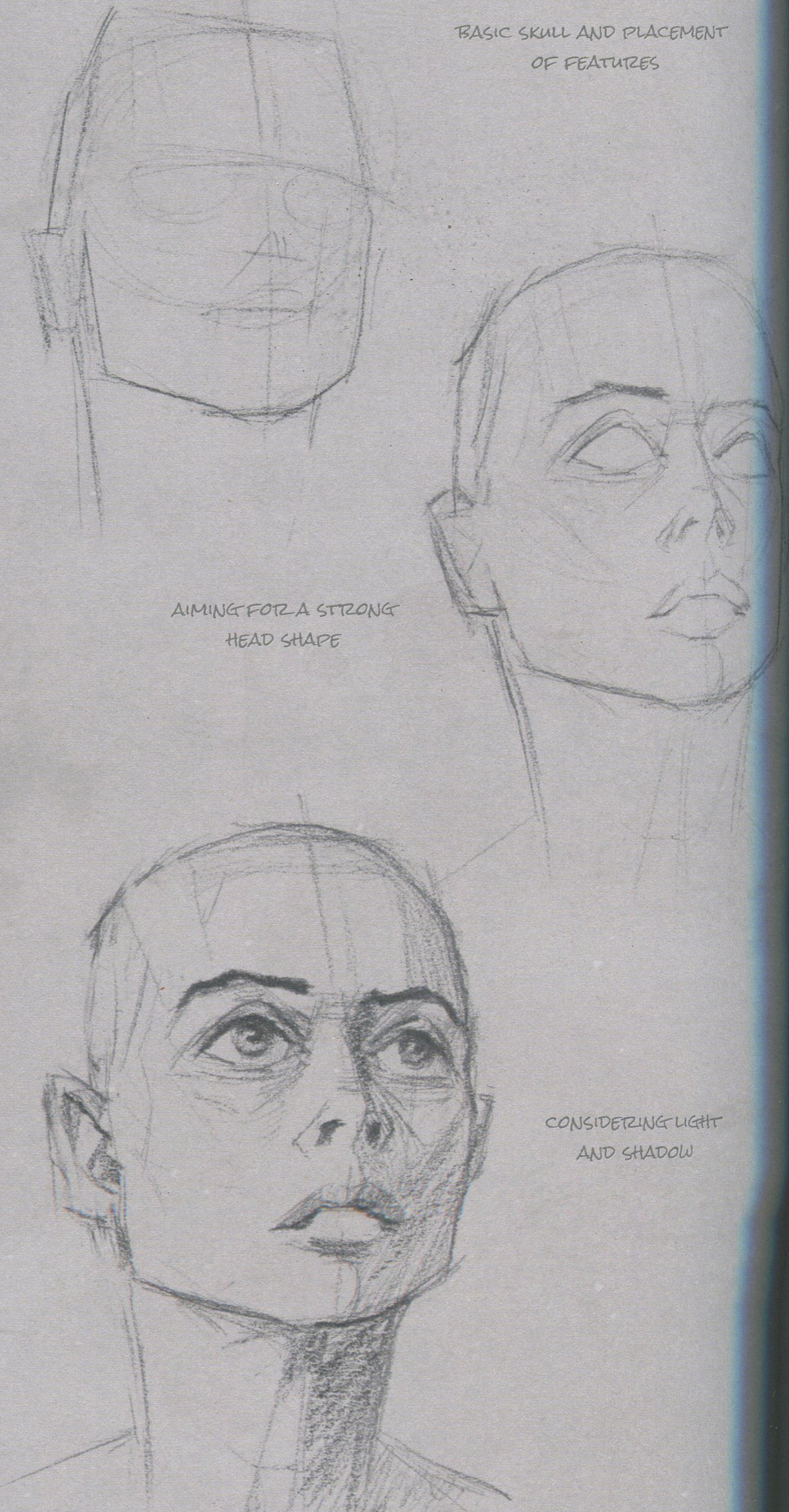
VENETIAN CARNIVAL MASKS

Human head

When drawing a human head from scratch it is useful to start with the skull and build up from there. Getting the jaw shape right is important, especially when drawing a female face. However, for a harpy a more prominent, less feminine jaw line may be appropriate in order to emphasize the power and ferociousness of the beast. I draw lines to define the center of the face and the placement of the eyes, nose, and mouth. The ears can be used here to suggest the direction that the head is facing; they will be lower down if the head is looking up and higher up if looking down.

The next step is to determine the shape of the eyes, nose, and mouth, as well as ears and the overall shape of the skull. I try to bear in mind that although the harpy is female, I should keep the jaw and skull shape strong, almost masculine in character. I draw in the shapes of the eyes, nose, and mouth using the lines I drew in the previous step as starting points. Even though the harpy's face shape is masculine, the actual features should be feminine and sensual; the eyes should be large and open, the nose petite, and the mouth full lipped.

I then need to fine-tune the details and define the shadows to emphasize the character and three-dimensionality of the face. I also need to decide which direction the light is coming from and add shading accordingly. For example if the character is lit from the left, the face will be divided into two zones: light on the left and the dark on the right. I use shading to define the eyes and how deeply they are embedded into the face. Finally I define the mouth, remembering that some parts protrude more than others and will therefore catch more light; in this case the bottom lip sticks out more and will look lighter in places.



BASIC SKULL AND PLACEMENT OF FEATURES

AIMING FOR A STRONG HEAD SHAPE

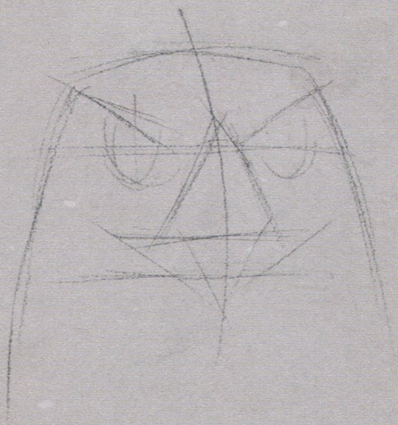
CONSIDERING LIGHT AND SHADOW

Eagle head

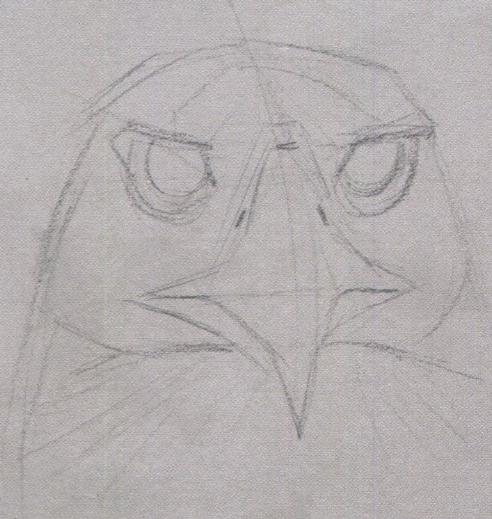
Drawing the head of an eagle follows a similar process to drawing a human head. I start by sketching the outline of the head and marking in the lines for the eyes and beak, plus a vertical line down the center of the face. I then define the eyes and proportions of the beak, using triangles to work out the correct proportions of the beak. Focusing on the ratio between the height of the eyes and the lines and size of the beak helps me to connect the bird features to the human face.

Having a good sense of proportion will help you to create the illusion of three dimensions and project the object towards the viewer when drawing something in perspective. In this case I need the beak to project further towards the viewer than a typical human nose. The top of a bird's eye should be in line with the top of the beak, and the brow curves around the head with the top of the beak at its base.

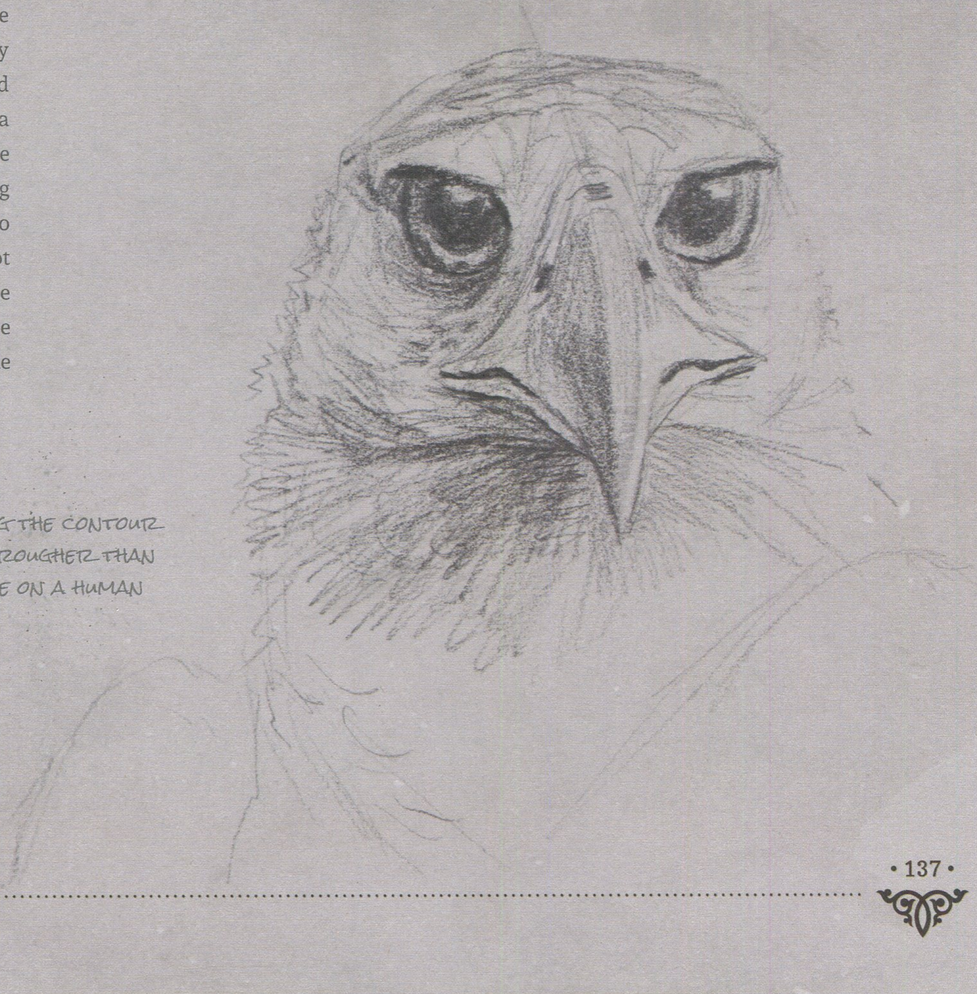
As with the human face, it is important to ensure the lighting of the convex and concave parts of the face are correct, as well as the bow shape of the beak. I focus on accurately drawing the directions of the feathers and the light areas of the bird. When drawing a bird's face it is very important to identify the direction and shape of the feathers spreading out from the beak and under the head. It is also useful to note that the eagle's head does not have smooth edges like a human head because of the overlapping feathers, so I make the contour lines a little rougher than I did for the human head.



USING TRIANGLES TO WORK OUT THE PROPORTIONS OF THE BEAK



BUILDING UP THE ANATOMY OF THE HEAD



MAKING THE CONTOUR LINES ROUGHER THAN THOSE ON A HUMAN

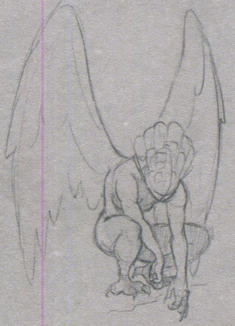
• DESIGN PROCESS •

Thumbnails

The thumbnails below show my exploration of the harpy's body proportions, pose, and silhouette. I explored different wing types to find the best match for the harpy's nature and the silhouette. Bat-like wings would fit the harpy's demonic nature; however, since harpies are described as part-bird, feathered wings would be the logical choice. I settled on using feathered wings and then considered whether the wings would look better as a separate appendage, like angel wings, or as part of the arms, similar to a bird's wings. I decided that angel-like wings placed on the back between the shoulder blades will add more to the character and silhouette, as well as being more functional by freeing up the arms.

Other aspects to tackle were the pose and body proportions. After trying to show some feminine qualities and making the pose more comic-like, I moved away from making the figure too feminine and tried to use limb proportions that are closer to a man's in order to ensure conveyed ferocity. I then decided to tone down some of the human traits and bring her closer to a wild animal, which fits more closely with Greek mythology; I started sketching crouched positions to suggest the harpy is lurking.

I was discouraged by my attempts to draw the creature flying because it looked too angel-like Using an extra element, such as a tree branch helped create a more natural, animalistic pose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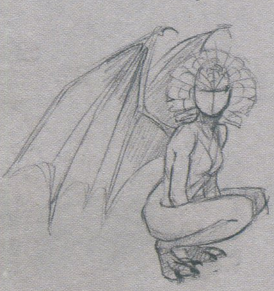
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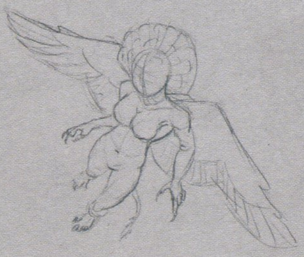
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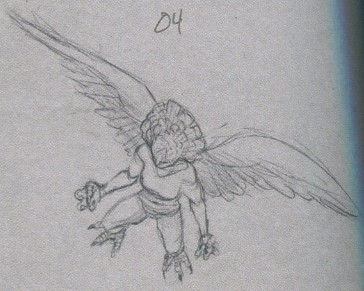
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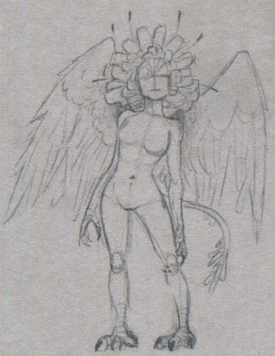
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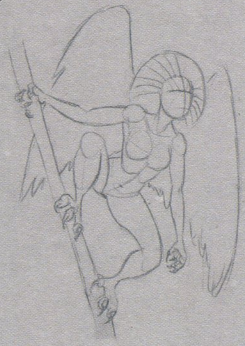
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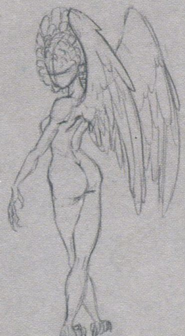
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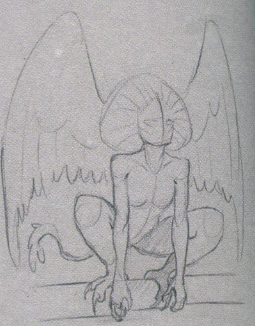
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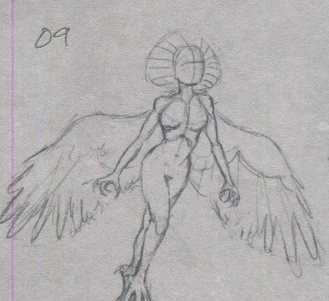
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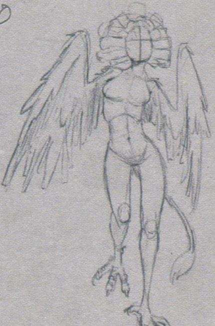
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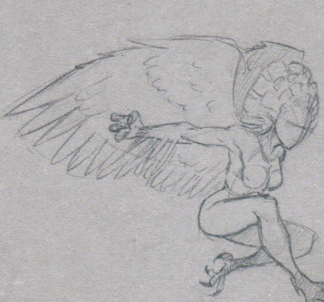
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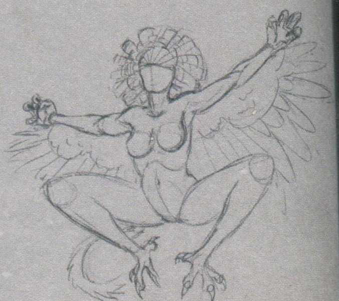
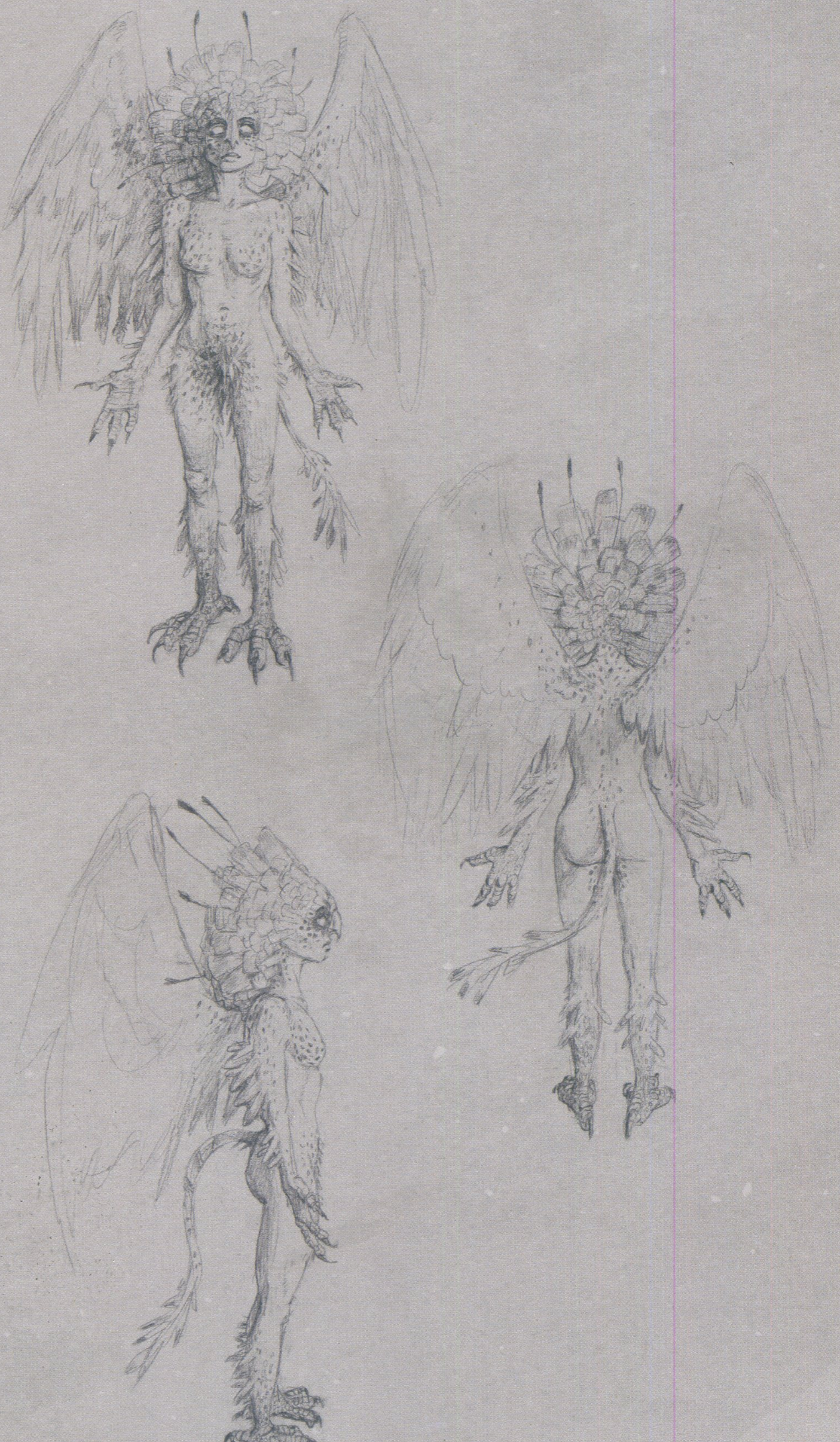

12

Further exploration

I decided to move forward with a forest-related concept because I liked the proportions and combination of human and bird qualities. From the front you can see that the harpy has talons on both her hands and her feet, which she uses to hold onto branches and grab hold of prey. I did not want her to look too appealing and feminine so I increased the size of the hands and claws of the legs relative to human proportions. This view also shows the proportions of the head and the plume against the rest of the body. I will use plumage and coloring to cover some of the more intimate parts of the body.

From behind you can clearly see where the harpy's tail grows, as well as a patterned texture from the tail through the spine to the plume on the head and along the wings. The harpy has magnificent plumage around her head; it is thought these are used in both mating displays and as a defense mechanism to intimidate any potential predators. This view demonstrates the pattern of feathers and the rhythms of their growth in a radial manner from the back of the skull. The harpy also sports a long, monkey-like tail that aids with balancing and maneuvering through forest canopies.

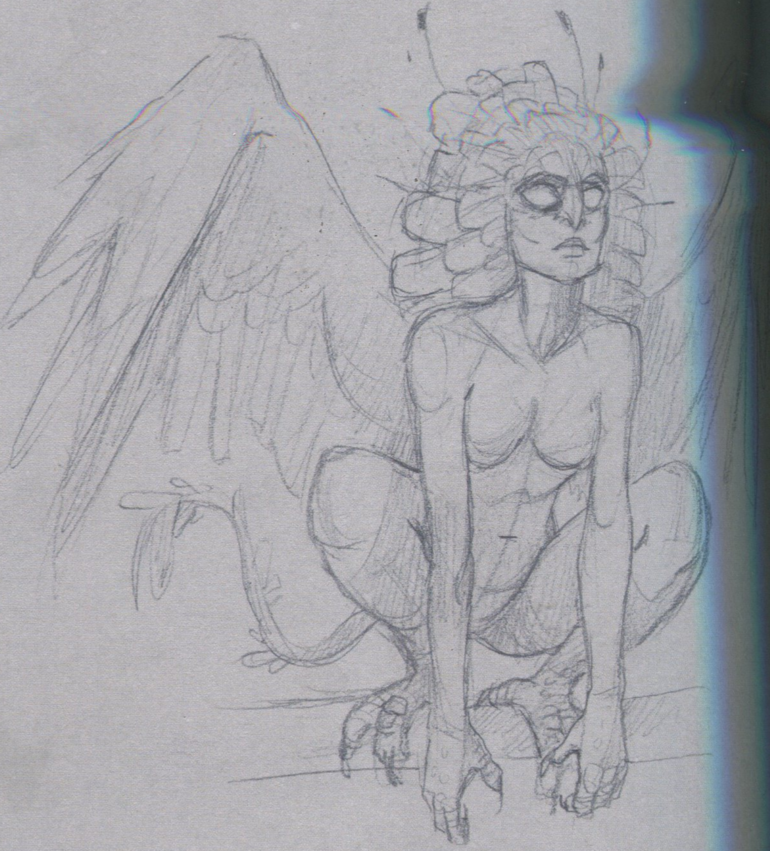
In profile you can see the single aileron-like feathers growing from the shoulders and legs, which help the harpy in flight. You can also note the proportions and shape of the harpy's brow, and how this creates a harmonious whole with the face of the monster and the head. The view also shows how the head plume is positioned relative to the rest of the body and how it falls on the shoulders of the character. The depth of the wings becomes more evident and you can start to appreciate the power behind them. •

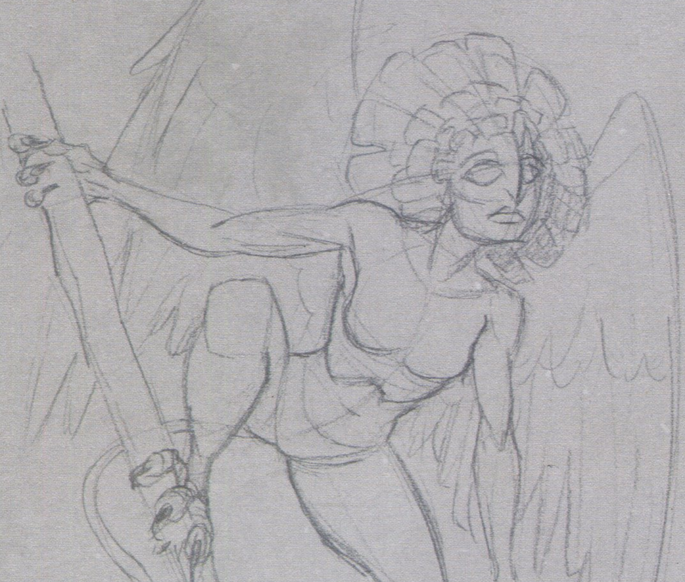


Poses

As I chose a forest-based harpy I decided to draw a demonic figure on a tree branch. Crouched on a tree as shown in the first sketch here, she looks both bird-like and monkey-like, with long hanging arms. She could be resting in this position or waiting for another lost soul or child playing in the forest. This waiting position is intriguing to me. The perspective and foreshortening gives a greater impression of three-dimensionality.

The next pose is more like a monkey on a tree than a bird. The position suggests the harpy is watching a future victim. It demonstrates the strength of the arms of the monster as it would be a big achievement to keep the weight of the whole body in one hand for a long time. However, I do not like the shape of this character very much as it is difficult to capture the real proportions of the body in this pose. The similarity to the monkey is too strong in my opinion.

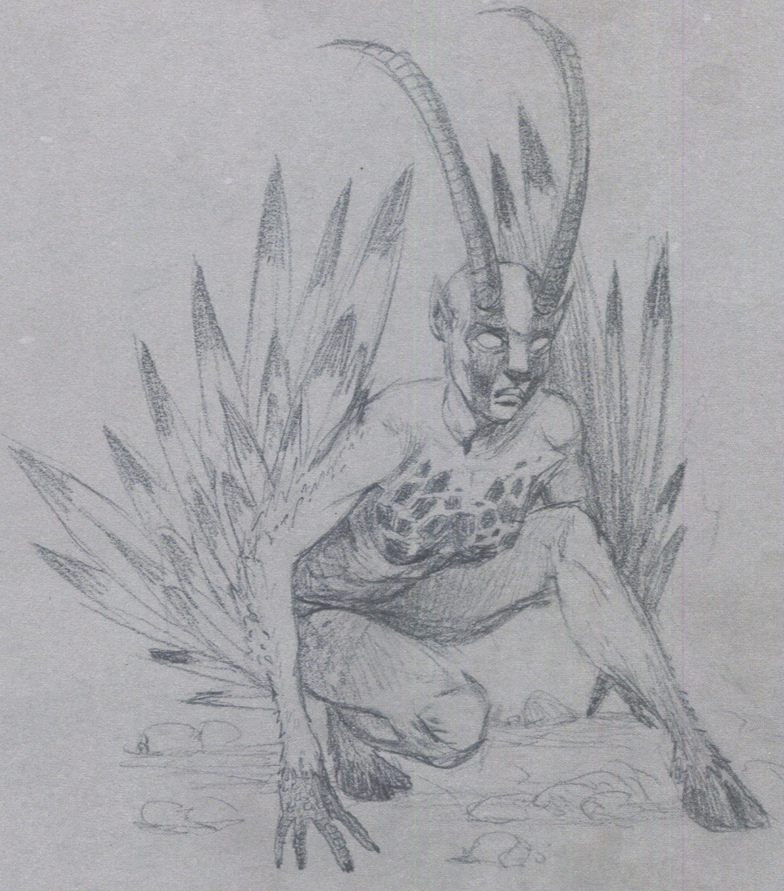




• SUBSPECIES •

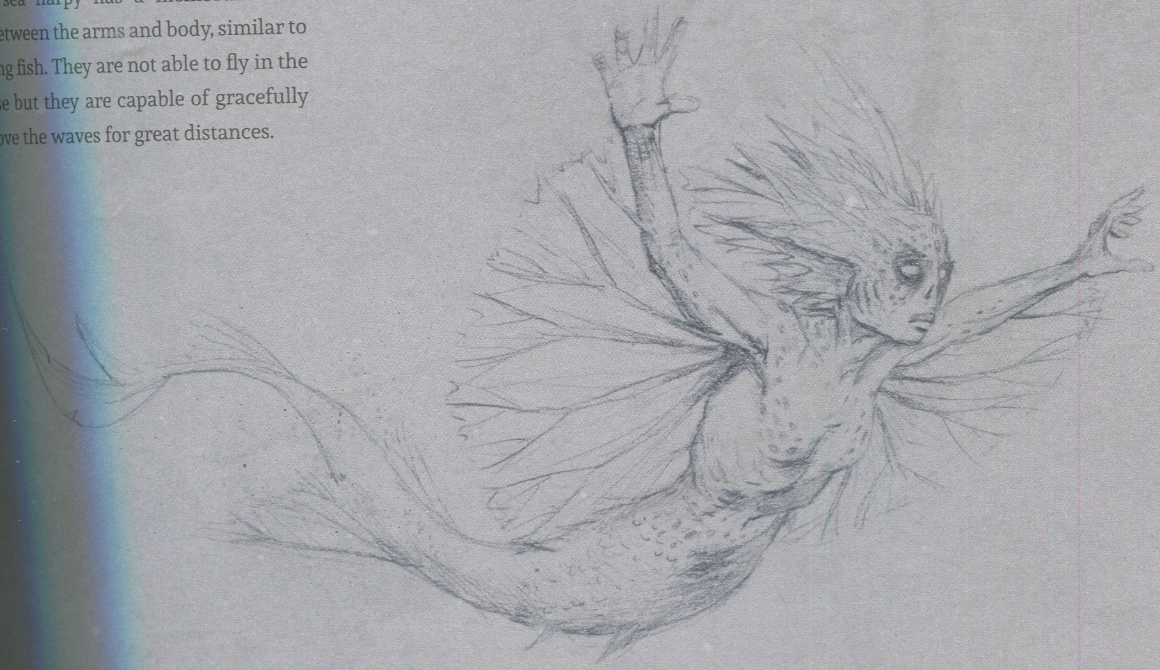
Rock harpy

As well as having some of the human and bird features of their forest brethren, rock harpies also have features similar to that of a mountain goat, namely cloven hoofs and large horns. They are not as aggressive as other harpies and they do not have sharp talons, possibly because they use their hands for climbing and gripping the rocks of their mountainous habitat. It is not known if these mountain dwellers are actually capable of flight; their feathers grow directly from the upper limbs and therefore might not be particularly useful for flying. However, they possibly aid in balancing on the rocks.



Sea harpy

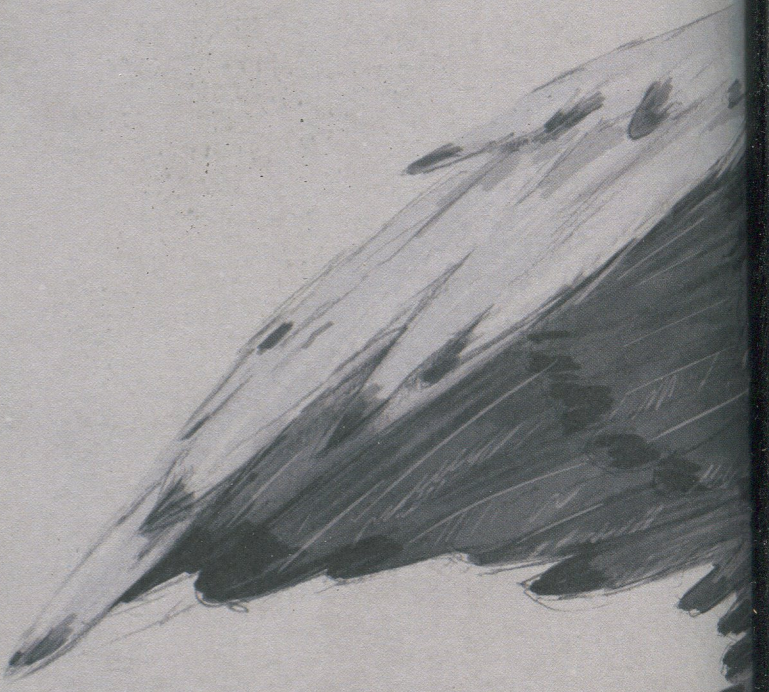
Throughout history the sea harpy has often been confused with the siren. They may look similar but they are two distinct species. The sea harpy is a fish–human hybrid with some bird-like features, including feathers around its head. They tend to inhabit the deep oceans but have been known to come closer to land and mankind. Many a sea harpy has run afoul of ships and been washed ashore. Rather than wings the sea harpy has a membrane that stretches between the arms and body, similar to that of flying fish. They are not able to fly in the truest sense but they are capable of gracefully gliding above the waves for great distances.

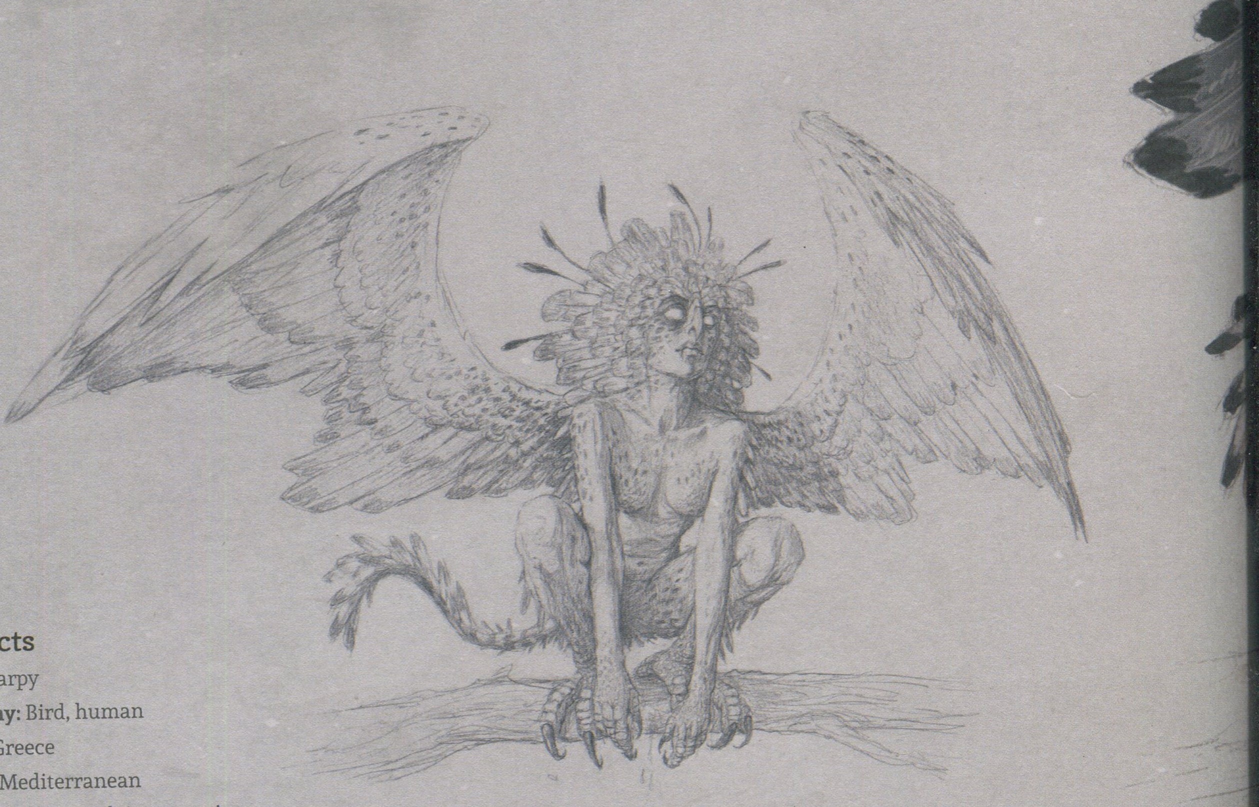


• FINAL DESIGN •

The final harpy is shown on a tree branch. I tilted her head a bit to the right, making her appear more animalistic. It is also taken from the behavior of birds that tilt their head when they focus on something, allowing them to observe an object with one eye. This is due to the characteristic structure of their head. In this pose, you can see the lower limbs resting and gaining strength after the last attack or in preparation for the next.

The wings almost create a dome over the demon figure. This position suggests that the monster is ready to break off into flight at any moment. The curved tail on the left resembles a cat's tail in a position suggesting apprehension and cunning. You can also see the tangle of claws at the bottom of the pose, giving the harpy added ferocity. I decided that I would not draw pupils, leaving eyes completely white in order to give the creature a more magical, haunting character. Overall she appears both graceful and merciless, ready to swoop down and carry someone to Hell.

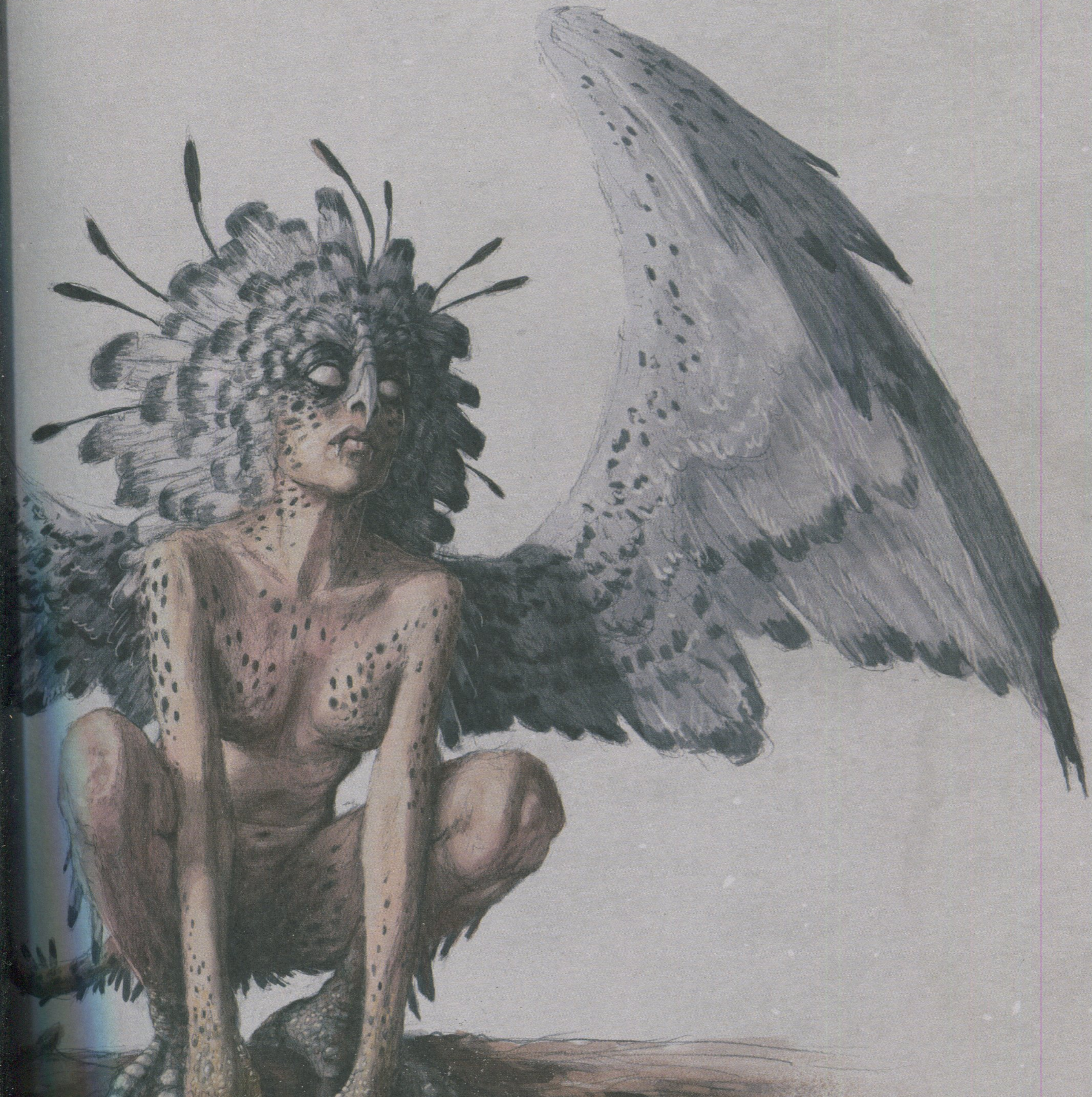


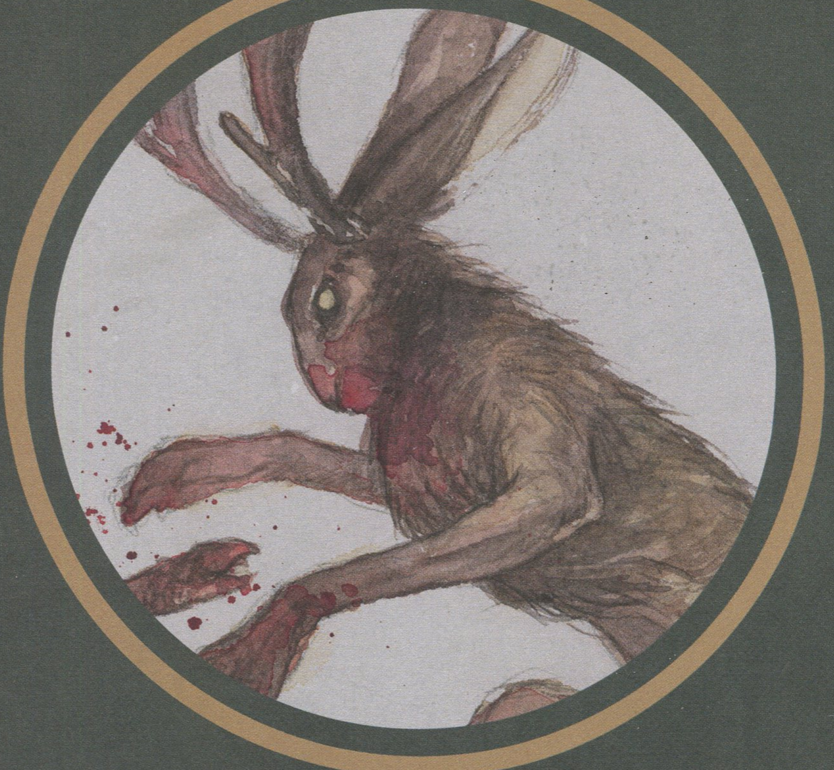


Key facts

Name: Harpy
Taxonomy: Bird, human
Region: Greece
Habitat: Mediterranean
Mythical abilities: *Flying, cunning*
Threat to humans: *3*

Final image © Tomek Larek





• JACKALOPE •

The jackalope is a "fearsome critter" from North American folklore. "Fearsome critters" were part of lumberjack culture, where lumberjac would spread tall tales of magical creatures that could be found in the forests of Wyoming and other US states. While typically associated wit North American folklore, similar creatures have made an appearance in countless publications throughout history in many different culture such as the wolpertinger in Germany. The rare jackalope is said to be extinct, but sightings of the menacing beast are still reported frequently is best described as a horned jackrabbit with the appearance of a hare with a set of horns, much like a set of antlers. The jackalope's fur coat i brown color, which is great for camouflage. On average a jackalope can weigh anywhere between three and five pounds and, in the spirit of t tales, can clock speeds of up to ninety miles per hour! The jackalope is also known as a warrior rabbit and is very vicious when it feels threaten Its speed, agility, as well as its claws and sharp teeth, are formidable and make it dangerous. It is also known to mimic human sounds; cowbo have reportedly heard the critter mimic their voices. All in all the jackalope is not a cute, cuddly creature like its leporine (relating to rabbi domestic cousin.

• IRIS COMPIET •

Artist & illustrator • eyeris.eu

IELD NOTES •

Antlers

The main features of the jackalope are those of a jackrabbit (which is in fact a hare, not a rabbit) combined with antlers or horns. It is basically the body of a hare with antlers stuck on top of it. But that is very simply put. In order to make this work the antlers will need to have a balanced feel to them in relation to the head and body. If the antlers are too big it will look as though the creature could topple over. The horns still need to be a focal point though; they are a sign of the jackalope's power and ferocity so they should be impressive. To blend the two elements together in such a way that it is believable it is important to reference and study various antlers and horns from existing animals such as deer. Horns or antlers are used to display attractiveness for the opposite sex and are used as weapons to fight opponents.

Hare legs

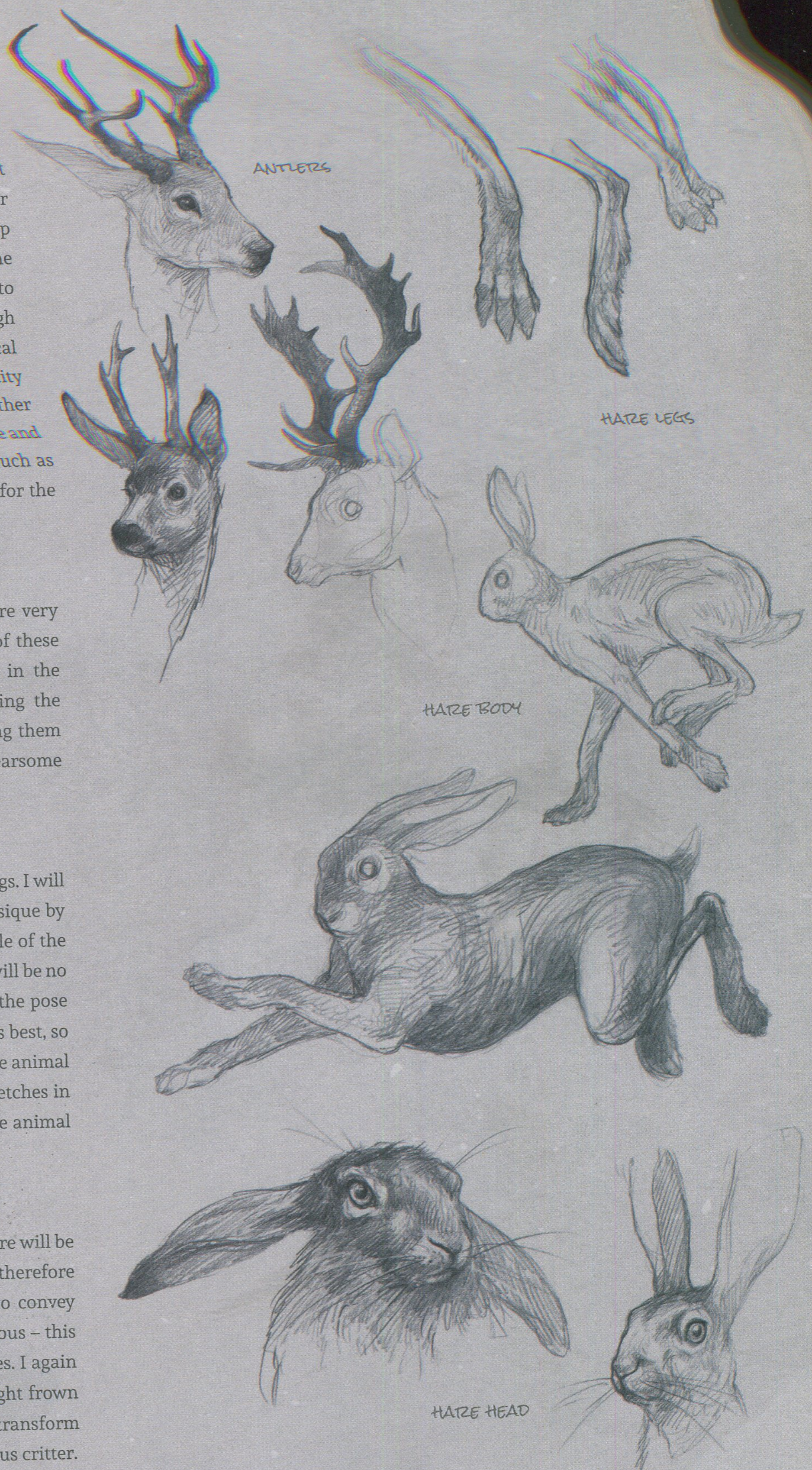
Both the front as well as the hind legs of a jackalope are very powerful. A hare can jump high and run fast because of these powerful legs and they are a perfect element to use in the design. Exaggerating what is already there – elongating the limbs slightly and making the paws bigger, even turning them into claws rather than regular paws – will add to the "fearsome critter" idea.

Hare body

The entire body of a hare is built for speed, not just the legs. I will look to amplify a hare's natural sleek and muscled physique by showing more of the underlying skeleton, such as a little of the ribcage. Exaggerating real-world anatomy again, there will be no fat on the body; it will be all muscle and bone. I want the pose for my final image to show off the beast's physique at its best, so an understanding of its anatomy is key, and studying the animal in motion is essential. I will need to produce a lot of sketches in order to become acquainted with the movements of the animal so I can begin to understand it.

Hare head

As the focal point of the jackalope will be the horns, there will be a lot of attention drawn to the head as well. The eyes are therefore another element I cannot overlook. They will need to convey emotion, and will need to be intelligent as well as vicious – this is a cunning animal that is able to mimic human voices. I again study real-world hares and consider that adding a slight frown and sinking the yellow eyes a little into the skull will transform the creature from a cute and cuddly kind to a dangerous critter.



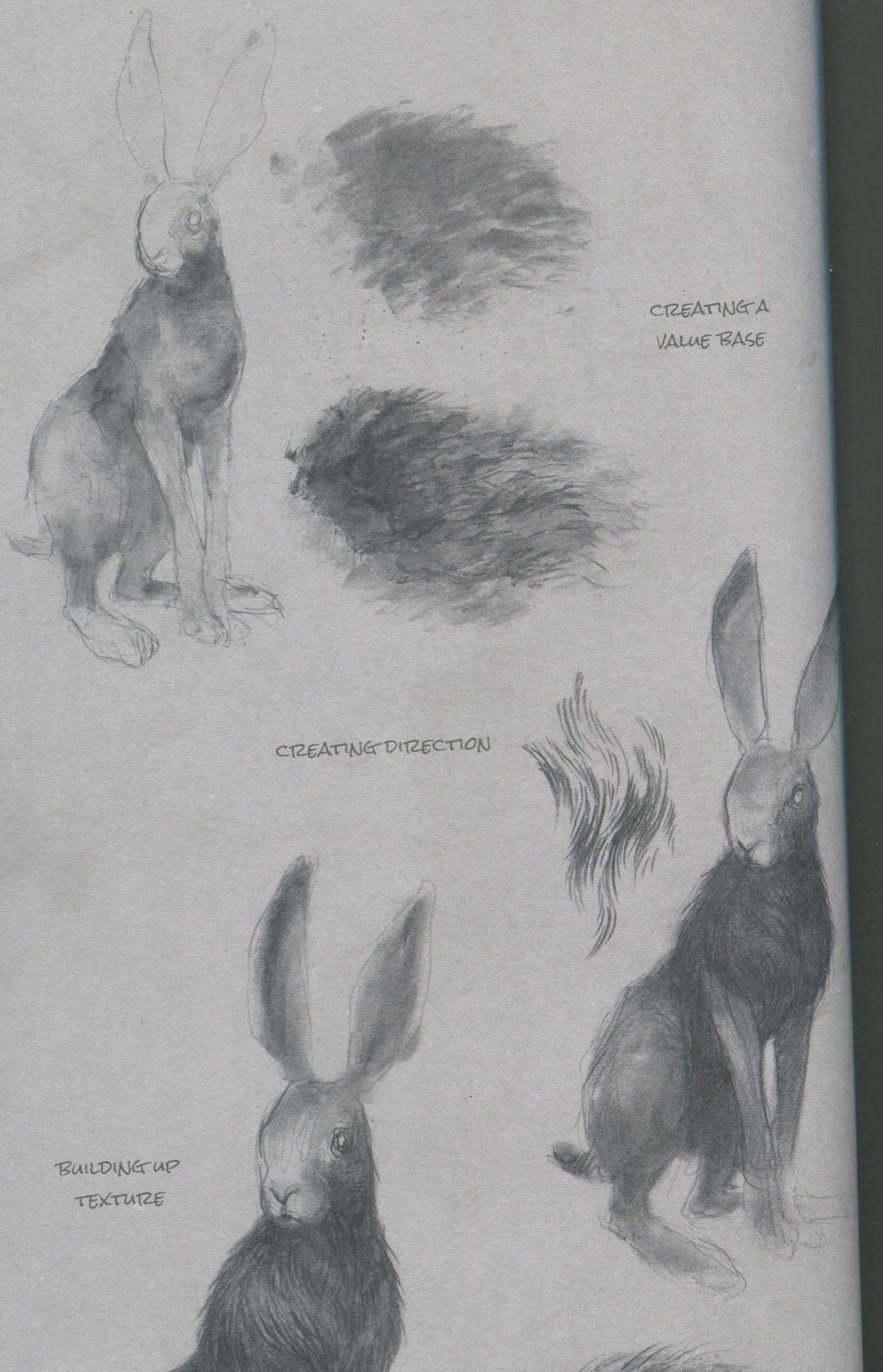
Hare fur

The hare's brown coat of fur is another key element in the jackalope design. The way a fur coat looks can tell you a lot about a creature, and I can use this to emphasize my concept. For instance, a fur coat that is well kept and groomed is more likely to belong to a creature of comfort. Shaggy and unkempt fur, maybe with some wild, longer tufts of hair sticking out, tells a completely different story. I will use this to my advantage; so many elements can be manipulated when designing a believable creature.

Drawing fur can be tricky. Many people are tempted to draw fur hair by hair or by covering the whole area in one value. However, when you look at a hare's fur it is a mixture of a downy fluffy undercoat and coarser hairs sticking out. In the above-right studies you can see that I begin by sketching the basic shape and determining where the darkest values will need to go. I make sure I follow the same direction as the hair grows, creating some texture.

I then add some flowing lines to the surface. To keep things interesting I play a little with the directions of the hairs. I also use the muscles of the creature to determine the overall direction. I then add darker values, as clumps of thicker hair tend to be darker. If it becomes too dark I use a kneaded eraser to pick up the graphite in that area.

If I feel I have added a few too many lines I soften those by blending them into the previous layers. Highlights can be lifted out with the use of a kneaded eraser. This eraser is also a handy tool for adding more texture to the fur if it is used like a texture stamp by pressing a texture I like onto the surface of the kneaded eraser. The eraser will be left with an impression of the texture which can be used to pick up graphite from the sketch.



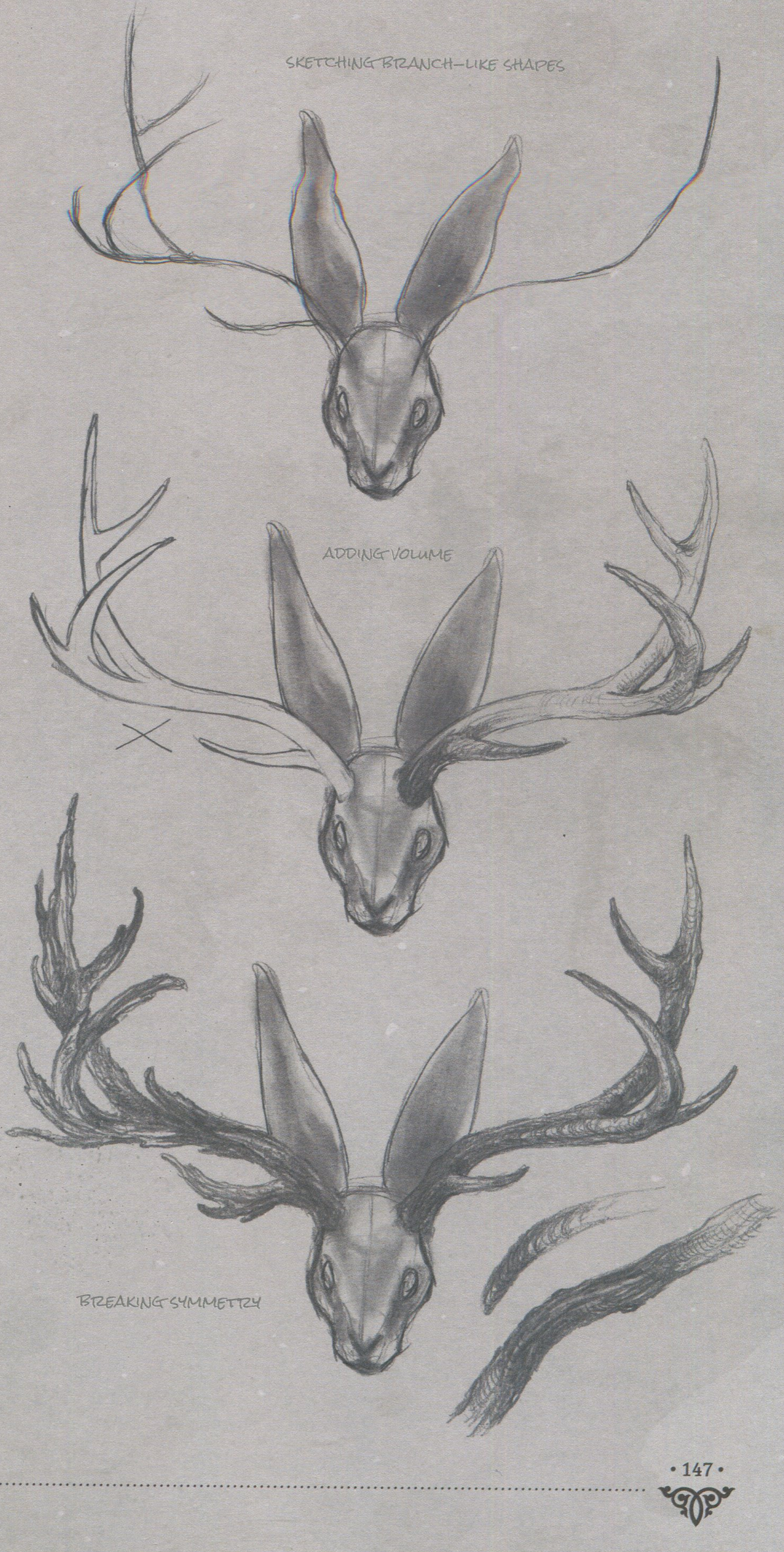
Horny growths

There is a difference between horns and antlers. Horns are permanent extensions of the skull, whereas antlers are not – they are shed and regrown each year. Horns have a core of bone and *usually grow in relatively symmetrical pairs. It is important to understand this* before starting to define the basic shape first *and where they will grow from the skull. Technically speaking, the jackalope has horns,* although I would like to explore antlers here as the shape language is interesting. Once I have sketched the basic shape of the horny growths I start to add more "branches," being mindful of the fact that these need to fit the design of the creature. Balance is important.

The next step is to add volume to the horny growths. A common mistake is to make them feel flat and unnatural by just outlining them. By varying the pencil lines slightly I am able to create a more natural feel to the antlers. I look at them as if they are growing trees, with tree limbs growing out of the stem. Adding shading that follows the growth direction will create a three-dimensional feel.

Then add more details and the finishing touches. Looking at real deer antlers you will see that there is a lot of texture to them. They are not perfectly symmetrical so I can vary them a little, maybe even breaking off some of the growths to show where the creature has lost a fight.

Using various hatching techniques to add texture, I continue to follow the direction of the branches. The growth and texture of trees and tree limbs can be used in designing the antlers. If I feel more adventurous and want to deviate from the original idea a little, I can create some aggressive horns by adding more branches and making it look gnarlier.



• DESIGN PROCESS •

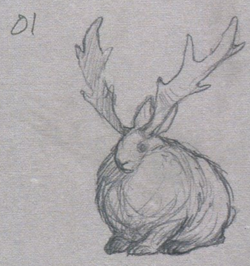
Thumbnails

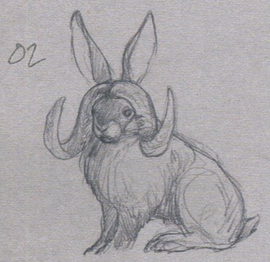
During the thumbnail stage I tried to find ways to design an interesting creature with an engaging silhouette and a story. The first two thumbnails are a little too rabbit-like. They miss the vicious feeling completely and are rather adorable. I imagine a jackalope to be proud, showing off its impressive horns, so I needed to find a way to display them.

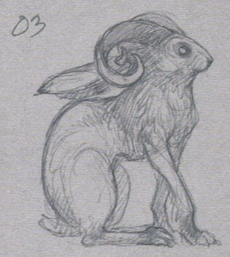
I find that the simple sitting positions, like those in thumbnails 03, 04, and 05, are too dull. They have no story or interesting shape to them. Thumbnails 06 and 07 have a little bit more variation to the theme. There is some movement here, and they present a pose that is more threatening.

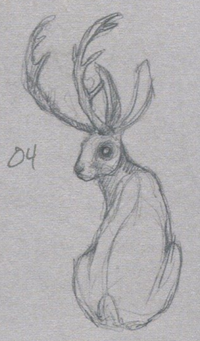
I needed to decide on the horns as well. I really wanted to deviate from the standard, and while deer-like antlers didn't work in 01, I like the outgrowths in thumbnail 07, which are a good combination of antler and horn. These bring something threatening to the creature but they feel slightly too big and out of balance, making it seem like the weight of them is too much. Thumbnail 08 is a variation on 07 but with some additional horn growths. However this no longer portrays an intelligent creature but rather one that has gone a little mad; it doesn't make for an interesting silhouette either.

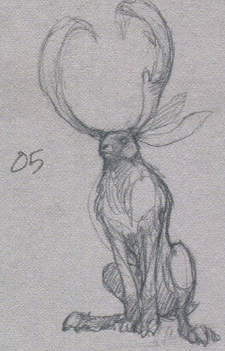
Introducing some speed and movement to the thumbnails, 09 and 10 show the creature in motion; however, neither pose offers an interesting silhouette and the jackalope in thumbnail 10 looks poorly balanced. After a couple more thumbnails, I finally satisfied myself with thumbnail 12. It had the right balance of action, silhouette, and story.

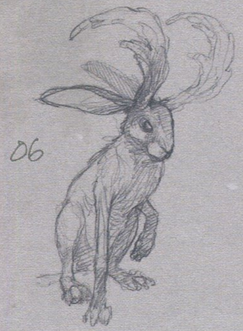


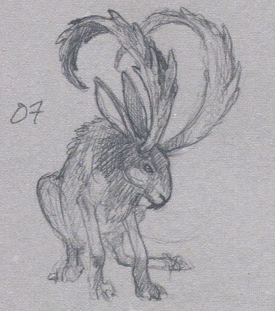


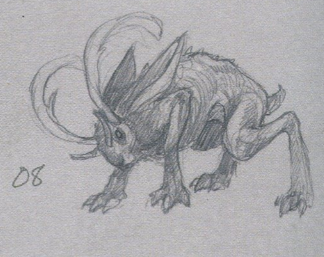


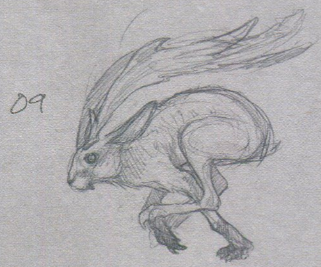


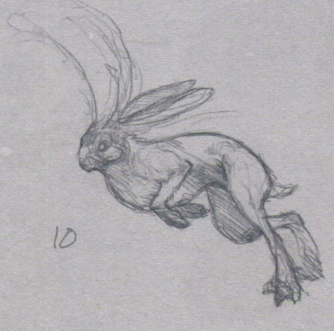


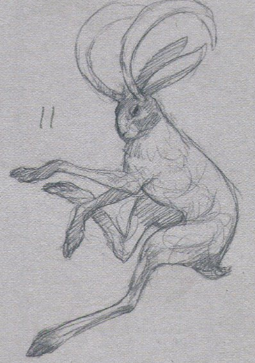


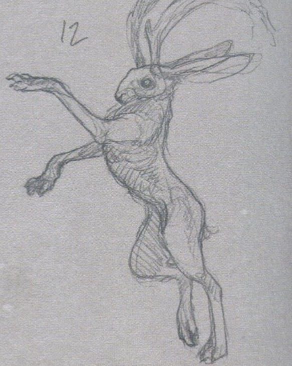












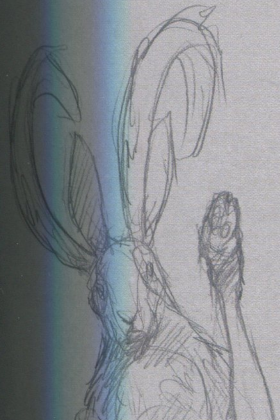
Further exploration

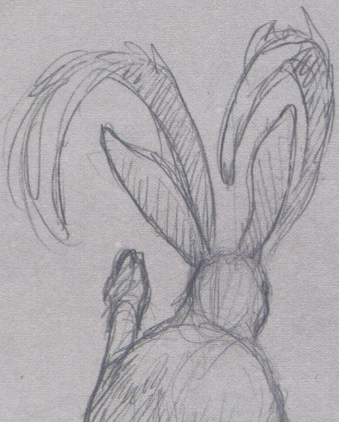
I chose thumbnail 12 to further develop the concept because it was the thumbnail that showed an interesting and proud silhouette, holding its horns high and looking menacing, ready to fight. It contains a lot of movement, action, and power.

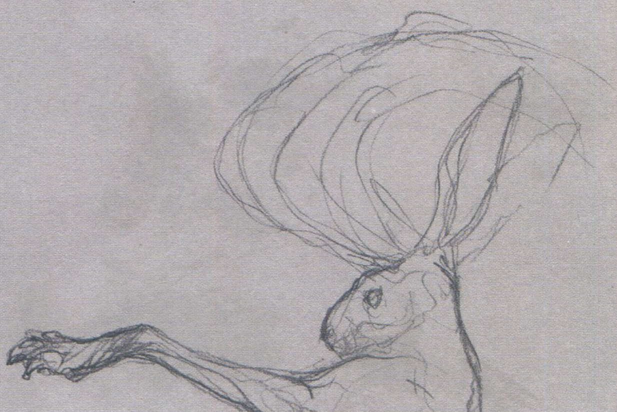
From the front you can clearly see the muscles in its legs, the large clawed paws, and the powerful breast of the jackalope. The slight bend in its torso gives the silhouette a little bit of movement and the slightly angled head ensures you can still see the eyes. However I feel that all of this needs to be exaggerated to really make for an interesting silhouette.

From behind you can see the tail and muscled back of the jackalope. The fur on its shoulders is longer than that on the rest of its back. This could be interesting to render. The front paws as well as the head are obscured in this view and you lose a sense of threat because of this. The line of the silhouette is too straight; it is dull and needs more action. Twisting the torso more and maybe even the position of the legs would enhance this.

The side view really shows off the jackalope's muscled legs and the claws, and is reminiscent of a boxing hare. It displays viciousness, speed, pride, and even intelligence, which I think are all trades of the jackalope; in one glance, it tells a story.



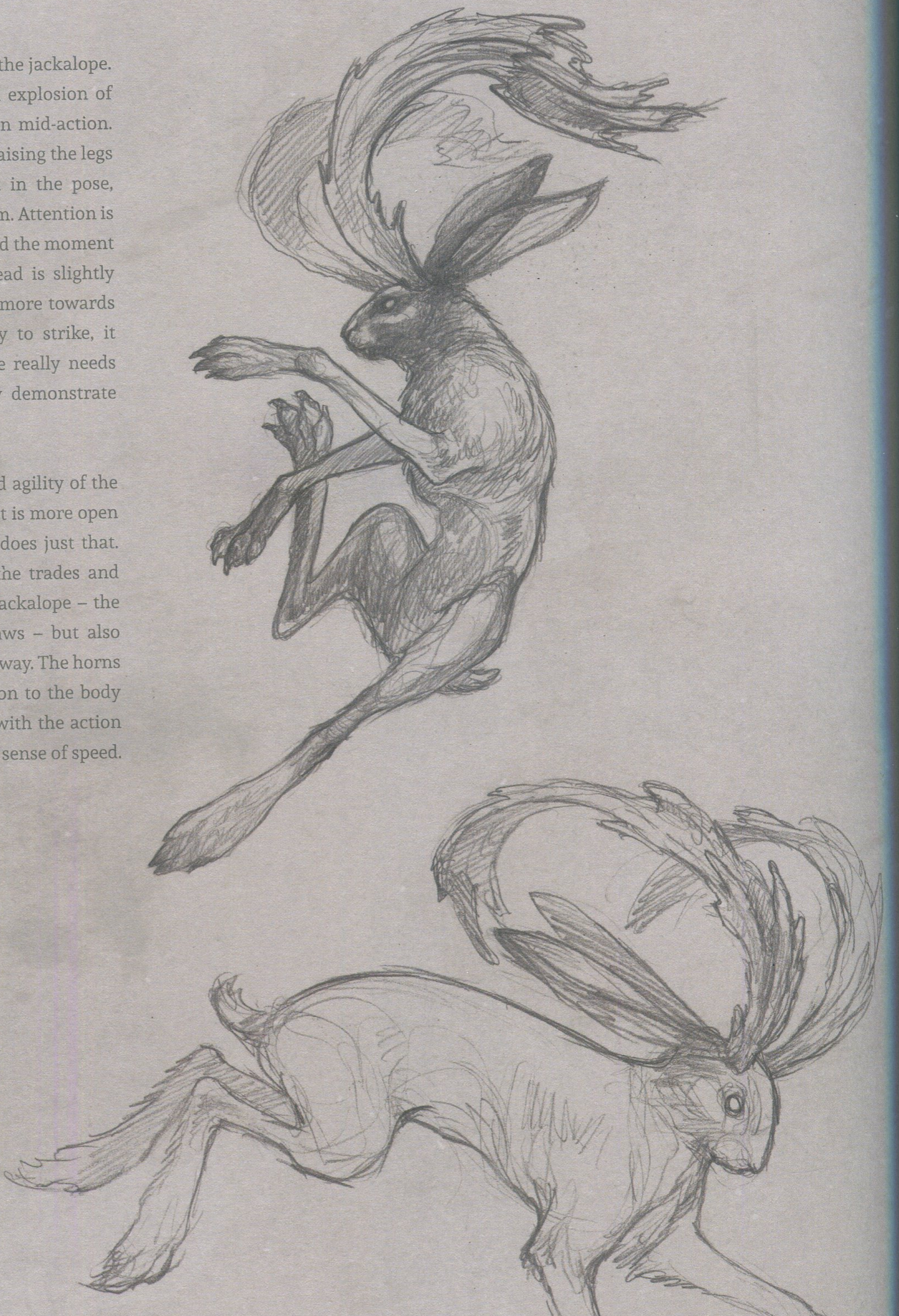




Poses

I really like the fighting poses of the jackalope. This first sketch seems to be an explosion of raw power with a pose caught in mid-action. By twisting the torso more and raising the legs you get much more movement in the pose, much more drama and dynamism. Attention is drawn to the dangerous paws and the moment of lashing out. Maybe if the head is slightly bent forward so the horns face more towards the jackalope's opponent, ready to strike, it would be even better. This pose really needs a second jackalope to properly demonstrate what is happening.

I want to show off the speed and agility of the creature and a running pose that is more open than the pose in thumbnail 10 does just that. The sketch below displays all the trades and physical characteristics of the jackalope – the legs, the muscled body, the claws – but also presents the horns in a pleasing way. The horns are perfectly balanced in relation to the body and the movement; they work with the action and not against it, adding to the sense of speed.



• SUBSPECIES •

Prehistoric jackalope

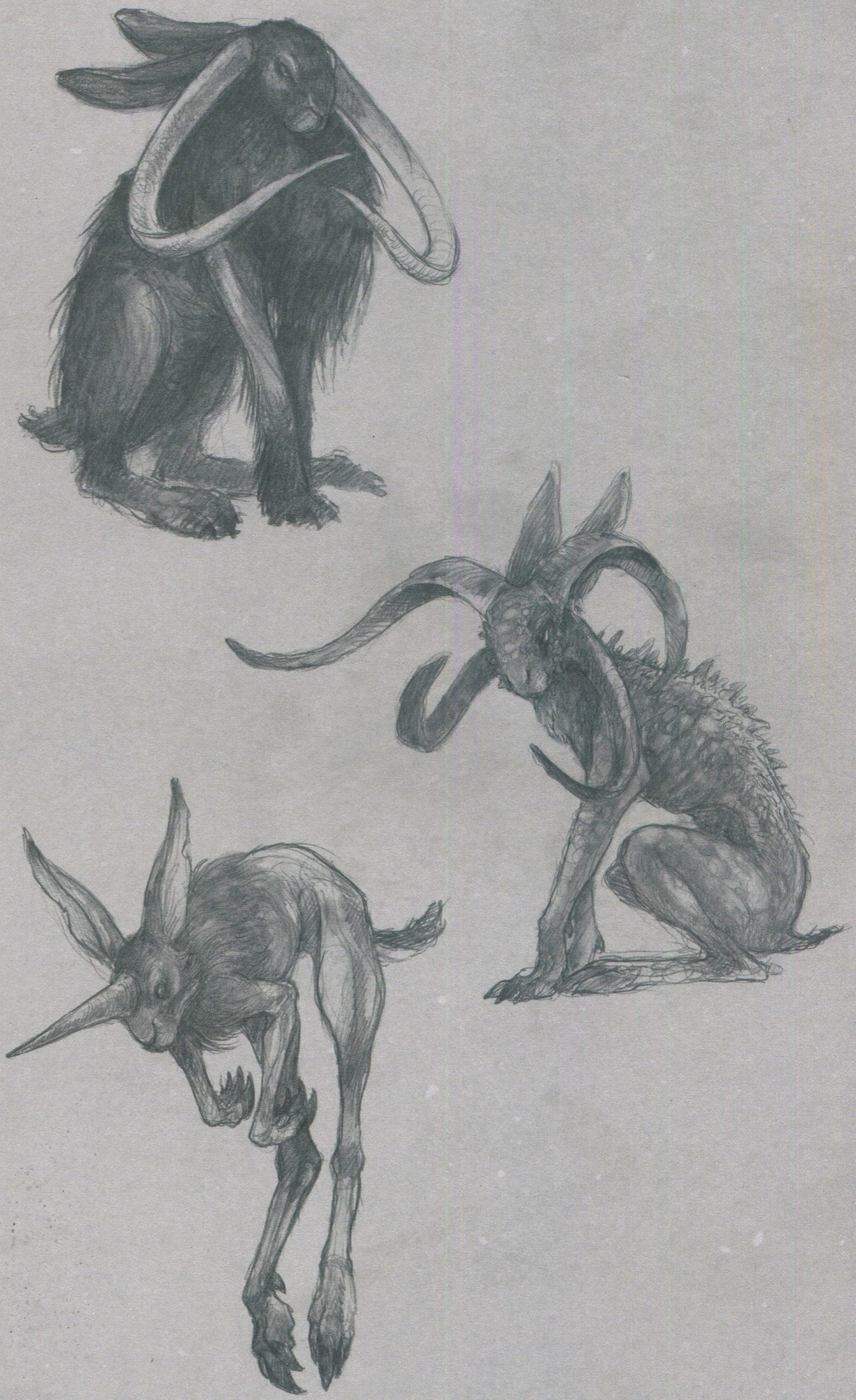
This ice-age subspecies of jackalope is a crossbreed with a mammoth. Its fur is long, thick, and coarse, perfect for cold temperatures. Its horns don't grow up but are more like tusks growing from the side of its skull. Its powerful neck muscles enable the jackalope to swing these tusks and thrust them into its opponent. The paws are bigger and thicker; this jackalope is not built for speed but pure raw power.

Desert jackalope

A much creepier relative of the North American jackalope, this creature has growths all over its naked body. Its skin is tough, weathered, and very leathery, so it doesn't need fur to keep its body warm. More reptilian than other jackalopes, it can brave the sweltering heat of the desert where it resides. It burrows itself in the sand, using strong paws to dig deep. The spiky horns protruding all over its body are defensive; any predator would think twice before attacking this one.

Rangalope

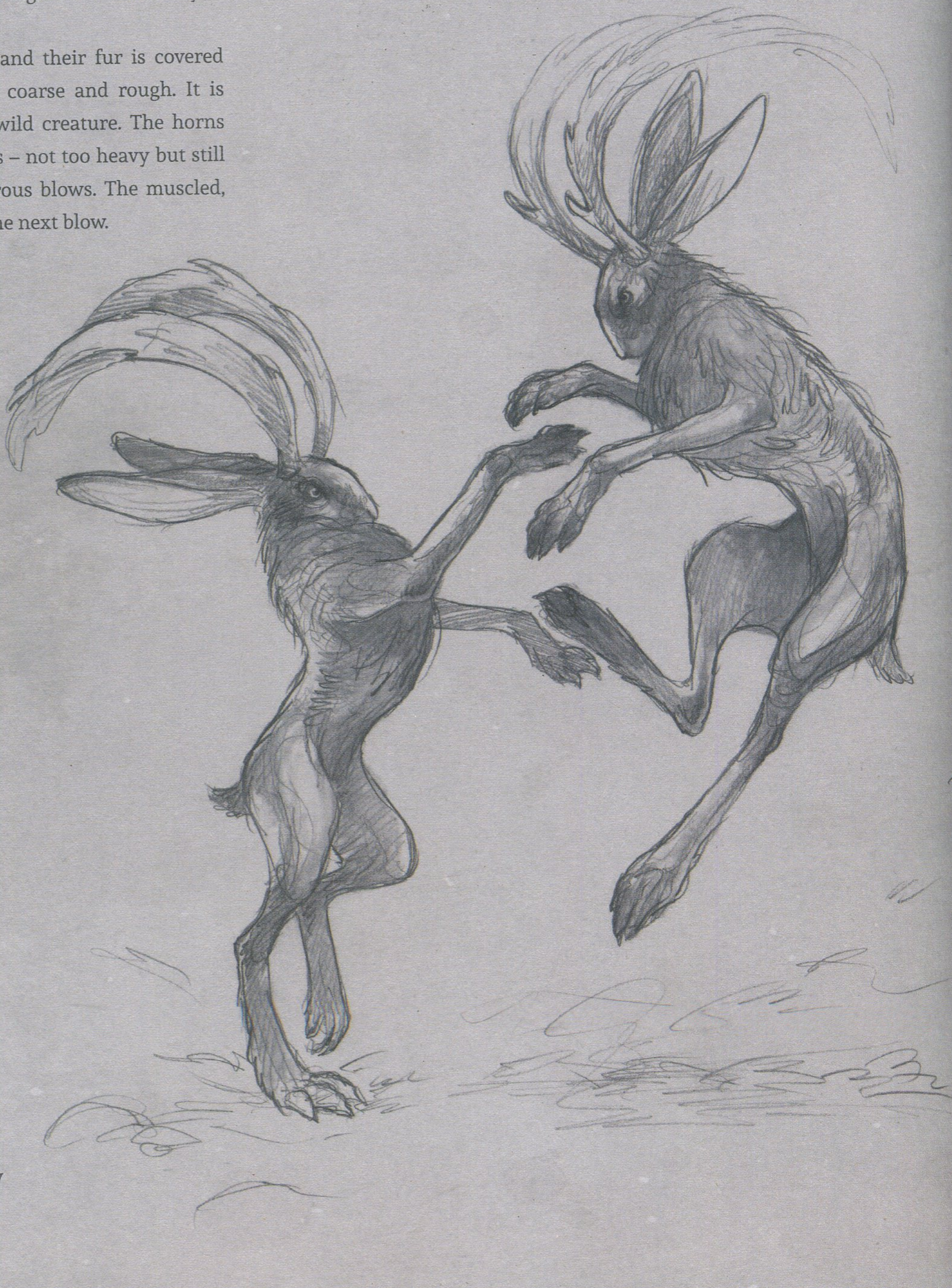
While in many ways the anatomy of a kangaroo is not too dissimilar from that of a hare, the rangalope, which is partly evolved from kangaroo DNA, has massive hind legs compared to its North American relative. Its small front paws are not used for running but are there purely to maim, and are equipped with fierce claws. The horn, similar to the horn of a rhino, is used to thrust into its opponent at great speed.



• FINAL DESIGN •

In the final design of the jackalope you can see that I used my favorite thumbnail, but have added an extra creature to help tell the story. I felt this pose answered the brief best and showed off every important aspect of the jackalope. It displays intelligence, danger, the warrior instinct, strength, and pride. I changed the pose very slightly, but by introducing another jackalope as the opponent in the fight, I can really show off the killer instinct of this creature. The eyes gleam with ferocity.

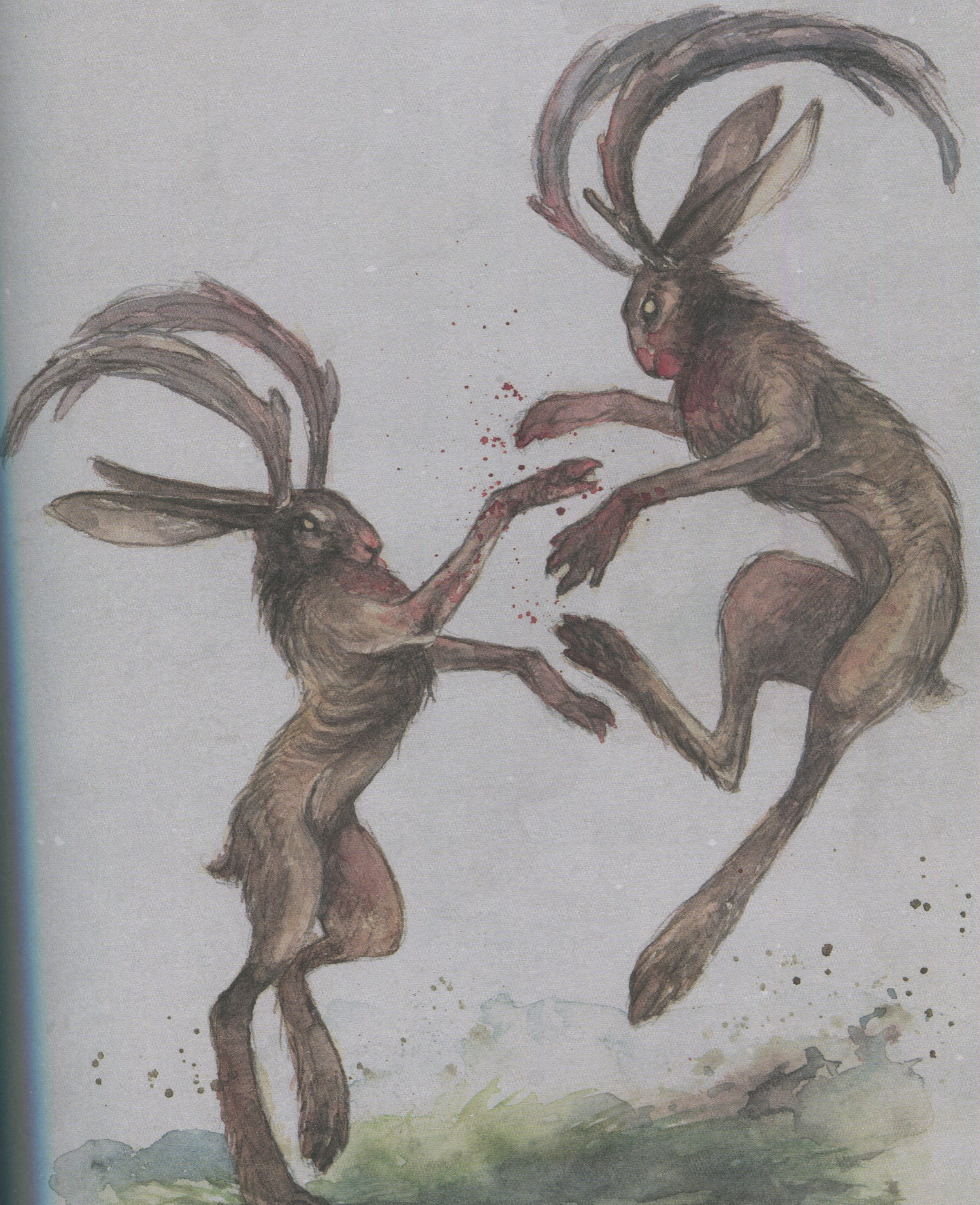
Both creatures have drawn blood, and their fur is covered in it. The fur is wild and appears coarse and rough. It is unkempt, adding to the idea of a wild creature. The horns are well proportioned for the bodies – not too heavy but still impressive and able to deal dangerous blows. The muscled, outstretched bodies are poised for the next blow.

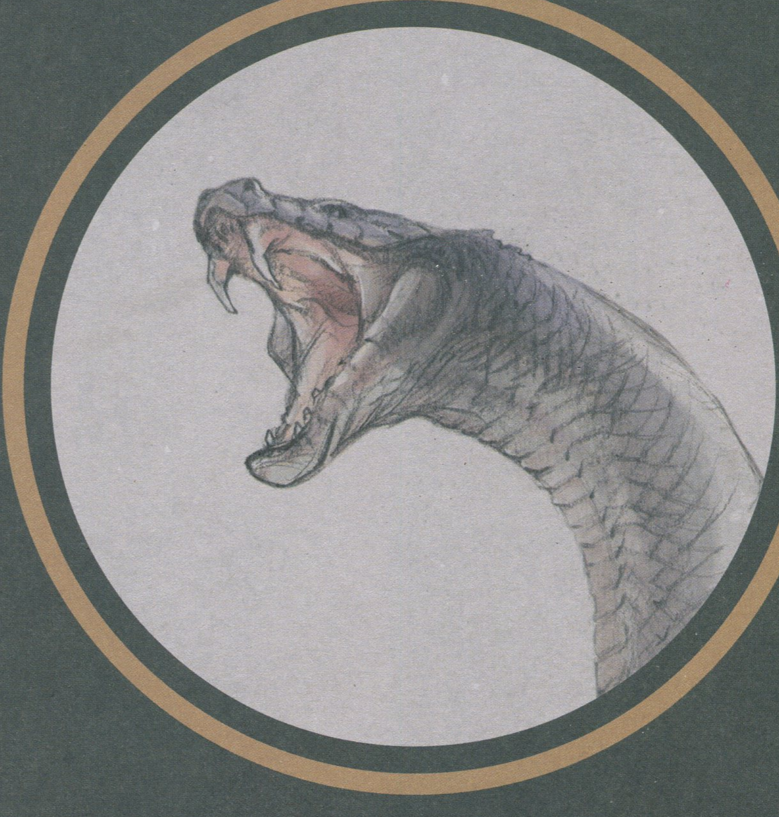


Key facts

Name: Jackalope
Taxonomy: Jackrabbit, antelope
Region: North America
Habitat: Woodland
Mythical abilities: Vocal mimicry
Threat to humans: 3

Final image © Iris Compiet





• JÖRMUNGANDR •

Translated from Old Norse, Jörmungandr means "huge monster." It is the "world serpent" of Norse mythology, a monstrous, venomous snake t circles the world, grasping its own tail in its mouth. It is one of the three children of Loki and the giantess Angrboða, and will release its tai battle Thor at Ragnarok, the end of the world. Thor and Jörmungandr are great enemies. One folktale tells of Thor being tricked into trying to li giant cat when it is in fact Jörmungandr disguised. Another regales how Thor, out fishing one day with Hymir the giant, caught Jörmungandr o fishhook using an ox's head as bait before Jörmungandr then escaped. At their final meeting at Ragnarok, it is believed that Thor will kill the be and then die of its poison. What we really know about Jörmungandr is that it lies at the bottom of the ocean and that it is very, very large.

• HEATHER HUDSON •

Artist & illustrator • artofheatherhudson.com

IELD NOTES •

musculature

is basically a tube. If I put limbs on a snake, it be a snake. However, it is not a consistent tube; s narrow at the ends and bulges in the middle, hout food in its gut. In a cross section it is riangular, composed of planes of gently curved muscle. A snake moves by gripping and pushing with its ribcage. To get a sense of its muscularity, the angles that movement creates in its body.

posture

can move gracefully on its ribcage, raise its n the ground, and even balance on its tail. It is t to look for the curves and counter curves in as it does so, because the rising posture is not one, and I want to emphasize Jörmungandr as being in motion. Thus I look for the curves of nd skeleton interacting with gravity.

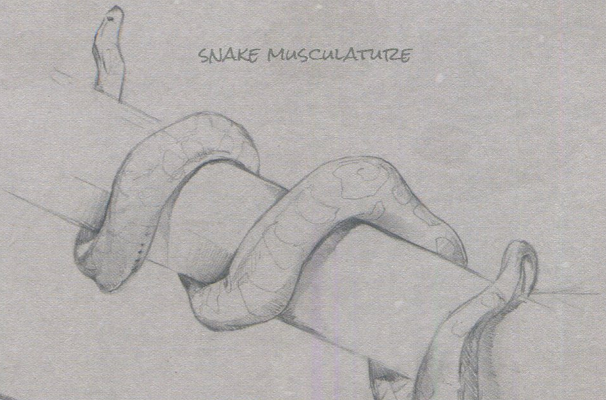
grip

hat interesting points on a snake include the tion of its jaws with its neck, and how the esses against the skin of its back as it grips an Without the equivalent of an opposable thumb a ust double back and forth to exert pressure and pressure at the same time. Note that as it circles t, the ribs compress and bulge at right angles to tion of force to create a stable grip.

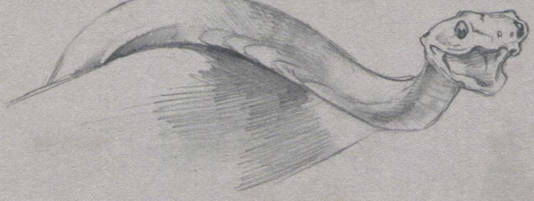
riment with the aquatic nature of Jörmungandr I ay eels. Their skin is much more wet looking and an a snake's, which is useful to be aware of. Their pear quite evil, although their gaping mouths are te what I am looking for to reflect a powerful with venomous fangs.

fangs

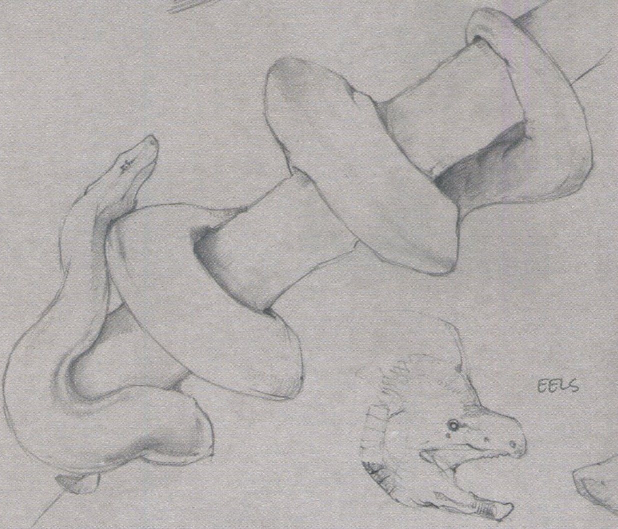
ill be an important element of the Jörmungandr I see that some poisonous snakes have folds of ue in the mouth that envelope the fangs, possibly tective device. This hides the teeth and is not from an artistic point of view. Other animals, tely, do not have this feature.



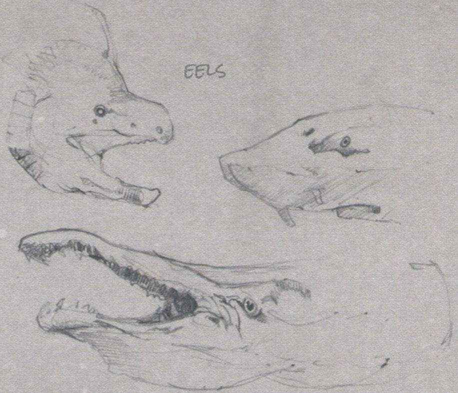
SNAKE MUSCULATURE



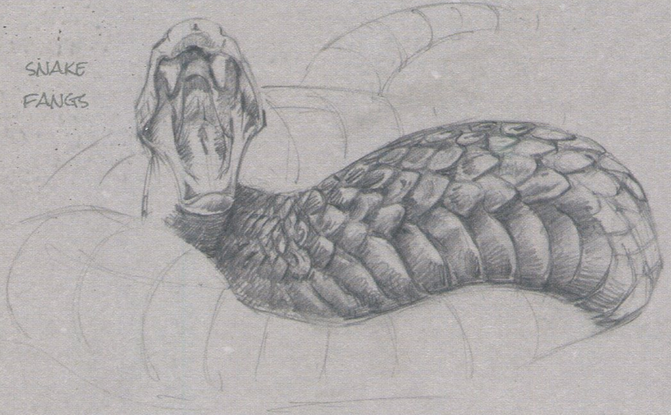
SNAKE POSTURE



SNAKE GRIP



EELS



SNAKE FANGS

Scales

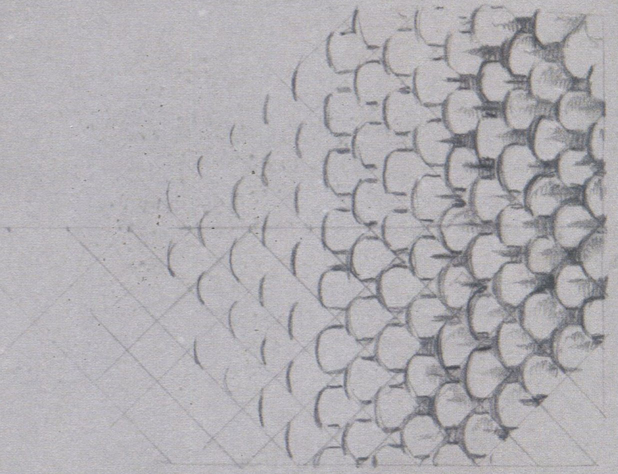
For scales, I start with a horizontal line laid down the center of the plane in the direction I want the scales to flow. I mark off the length of each scale on the center line in regular intervals, and run opposing diagonal lines through each tick mark to form a grid of diamonds across the plane. Then, depending on the type of scale desired, I rough in the basic scale shapes on each diamond; in this first sketch I create blunt scales by rounding off the outside point of each diamond and tucking the ends under the curve of each preceding scale. This gives me a simple scale form to build up with shadow and texture.

The challenge is that snakes and other creatures are seldom flat planes, and my grid must flow over a three-dimensional animal, defining forms as well as its own texture. I often start by again drawing diagonal lines across the surface, this time adhering to the shape of the snake. This will mean that the lines are not straight, but curve more severely as they wrap around the snake's cylindrical body. It is important to remember that as a snake coils and slithers, sections of its body will move from being perpendicular to parallel with our cone of vision. The scales, and therefore the grid, will need to become distorted and shortened by perspective.

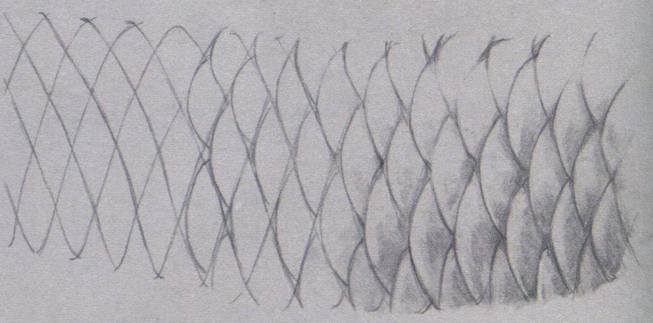
When rendering scales in perspective, I often find it useful to step back and draw a study from reference, looking at the specificity of an actual sample for direction. The angle, texture, and reflective properties of the scales I work on are all tools to be considered in creating a creature, and are often more visible in the final art than the individual scales themselves. Here a block of very traditional fish scales contrasts with the textures of a primitive sturgeon.

Lighting can be helpful as well. A foreshortened plane can be hidden in shadow or reflected light. Wet fish are shiny, and shiny things reflect the tone and hue of the sky on their topmost planes.

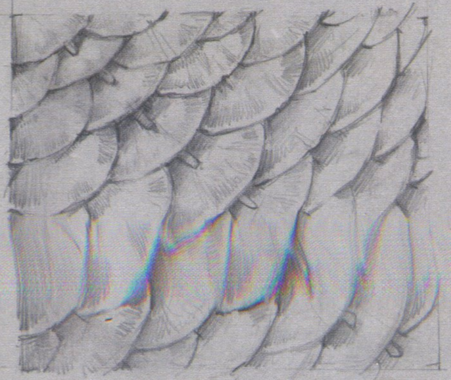
USING A DIAMOND GRID TO BUILD UP SCALES



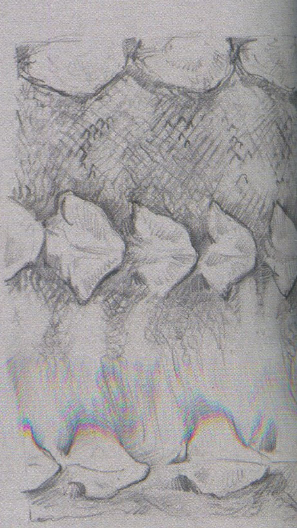
CONSIDERING PERSPECTIVE



REFERRING BACK TO REAL-WORLD SCALES



COMMON FISH SCALES



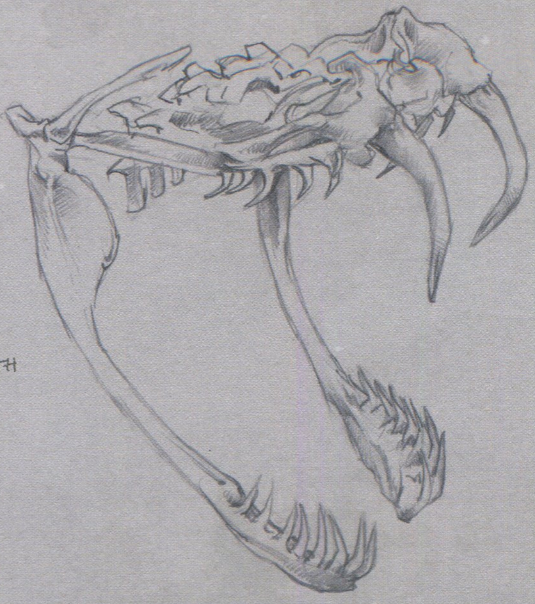
STURGEON SCALES

Snake teeth

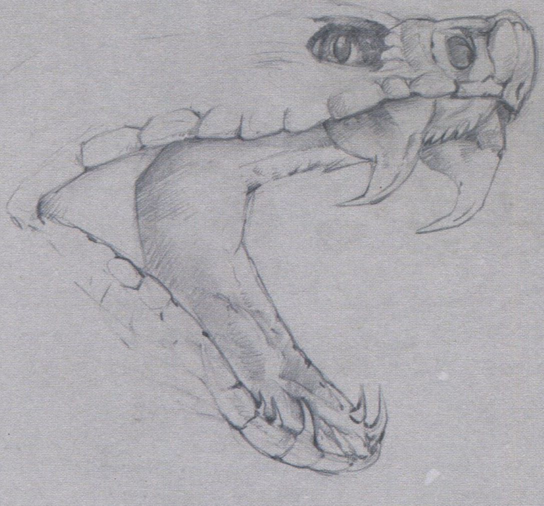
Most snake teeth are small, backwards-pointing pegs that aid the snake in grasping and swallowing without getting in the way. These are almost unnoticeable in the fleshed mouth. The great exception is the fangs of venomous snakes, which have evolved as a way to pierce skin and deliver venom to a victim without being damaged or poisoning the snake itself. In some species, the fangs are rigged to fold back in the mouth when not in use. In the skeletal sketch on the right here, the fangs show as dramatic hooks descending from the upper jaw. Note that the lower jaw is not fused; this aids in swallowing large prey, and gives the snake a distinctively chinless look.

In the next, live snake sketch, the impressive fangs of the skull are embedded in gum tissue. The venom glands and sacs generally sit behind each fang, turning the impressive spike into a fleshy, triangular wedge. For a non-magical creature, I would look at lifestyle and environment, and extrapolate from that to decide the kind of teeth the creature would find useful, using snakes in similar environments for reference. Jörmungandr is a unique magical creature, and its primary need is to look evil. In this case I will therefore back away from realism and leave more of the dramatic tooth showing in the mouth.

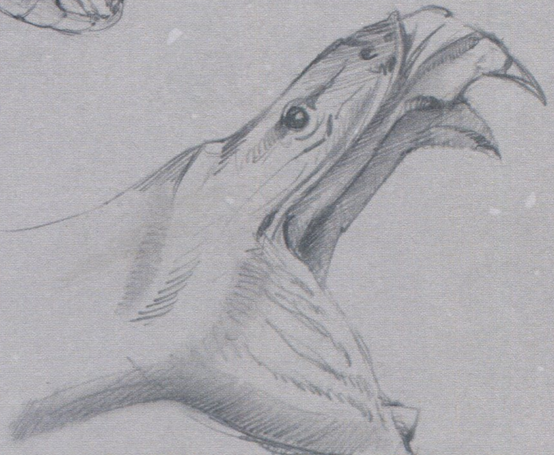
In some species of snake, the upper lip can be drawn or flipped back away from the fangs when in use. This looks horrific but also weird and, in design, should be used with caution.



SNAKE JAW AND TEETH



SNAKE MOUTH WITH GUM TISSUE



RETRACTED UPPER LIP

• DESIGN PROCESS •

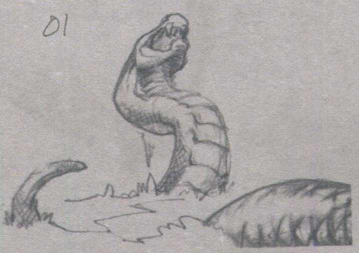
Thumbnails

When designing a creature, I like a simple pose that displays the elements of the beast – size, proportion, creature attributes – and allows me to scribble out a page of ideas without fussing with perspective too much. Here I played with proportion of head to body, bulky versus slender, smooth versus textured, and with mixes of creature elements that might make an interesting sea serpent.

A good design for this would be one that is unusual enough to be memorable, but traditional enough to be accepted as part of the story without conscious thought by the viewer. A key element for me is size – I want the creature to feel huge on the page, so I made a mental note to make the head smaller relative to the body, and the eyes smaller relative to the head, in future iterations.

I looked at further references, including adders, eels, gars, sturgeons, dunkleosteus species, dragons, and dinosaurs like the tyrannosaurus rex. The world serpent is a particularly blank slate since it has no evolutionary tree to draw on. I therefore looked at the prows of Viking long ships for inspiration as well.

The thumbnails that show the serpent's twisting body emerging from the depths help suggest the size, as you get the sense there is a lot more of the snake that you can't see. These ones also offer a pleasing curve that makes the most of the tube-like body.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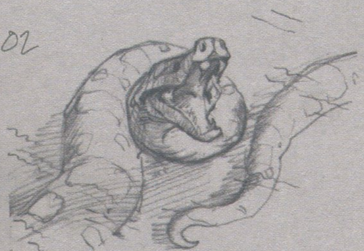
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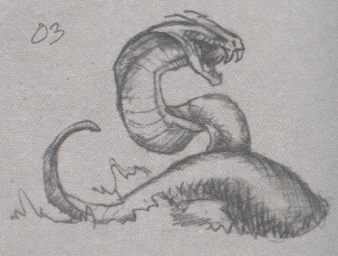
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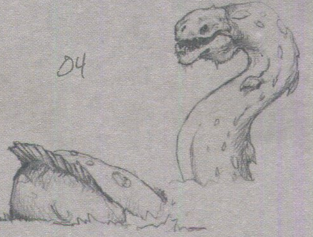
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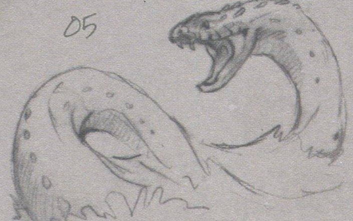
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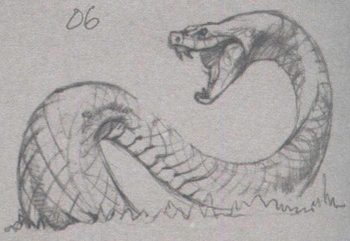
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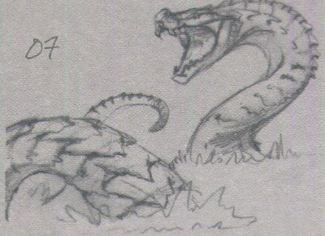
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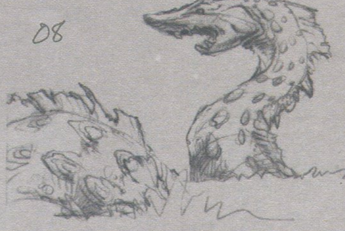
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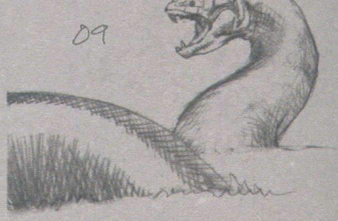
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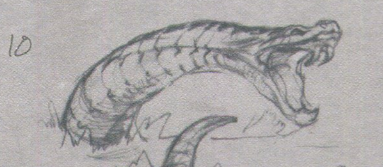
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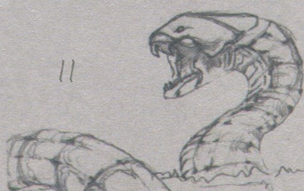
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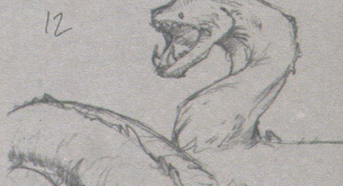
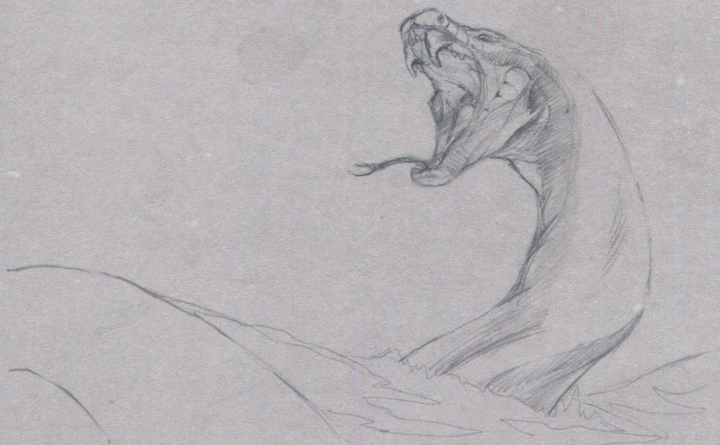
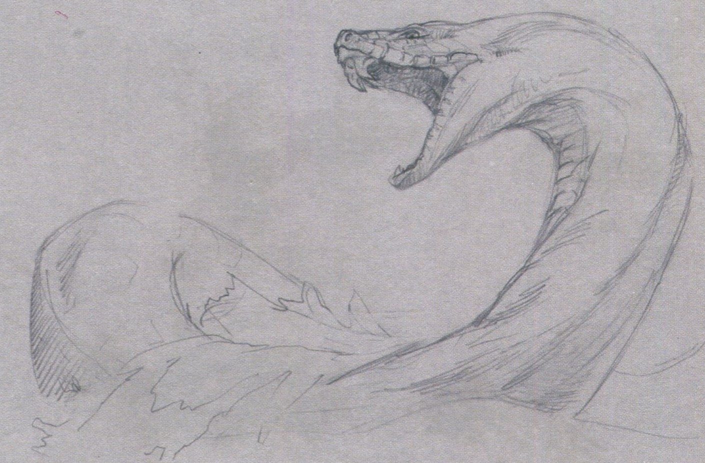

12

Further exploration

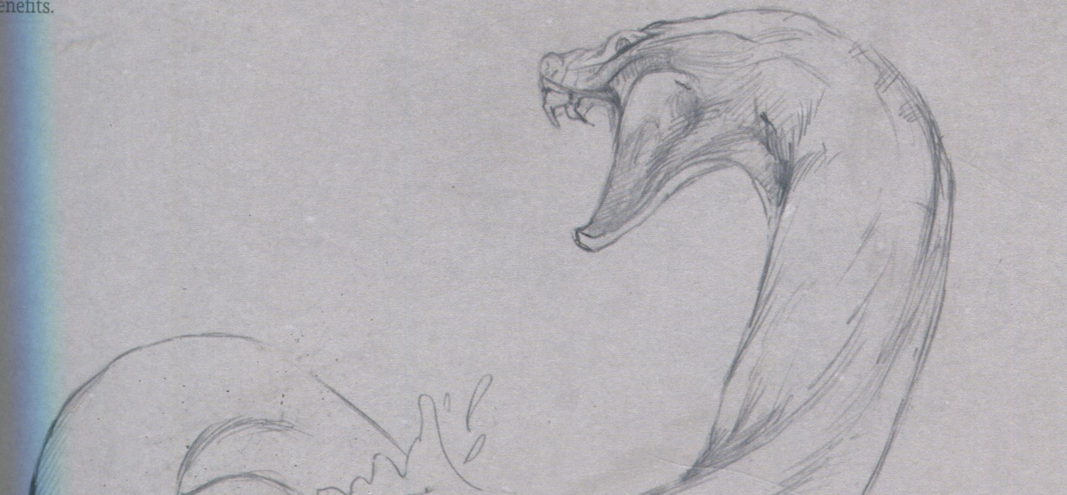
I decided to build on thumbnail 02, the traditionally snaky Jörmungandr. At this point, I built a simple clay model to see how the jaw looked from below. I can use a low viewpoint like the one used in the sketch on the right to convey the size of the creature and show the architecture of the mouth and the disproportionately large fangs. Its twisting body can be defined with interesting wet highlights.



From the side, the interior of the mouth still shows well. A lot of the movement of the form is lost as the curves of the lower torso are foreshortened. They are still there, of course, and could be brought out with highlights and contrasts, but I would lose the movement in the silhouette and create a challenge where no challenge needs to be.

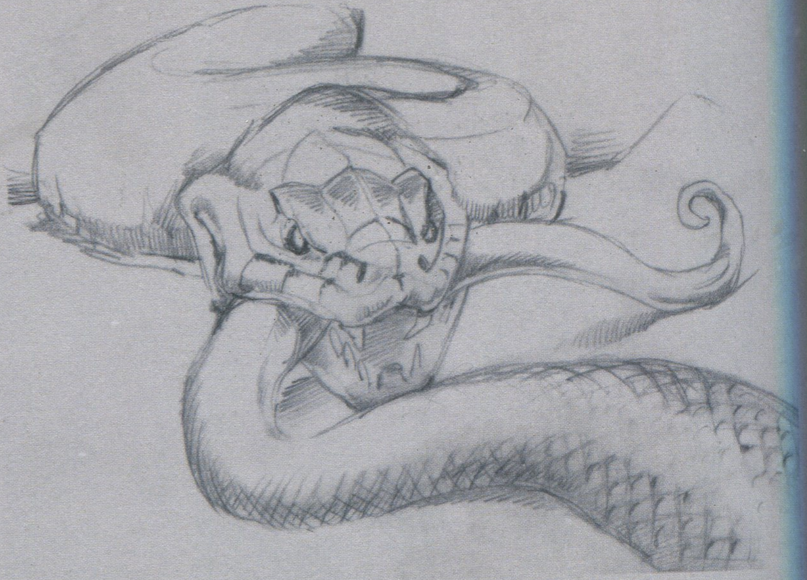


The best aspect from the rear perspective is that the fangs of Jörmungandr can be silhouetted against the sky. The weaknesses of this view for me are that the face is obscured by perspective; there is no element of the creature in foreground; and I am not positive how the articulation of the jaw would work from this angle. It is an interesting pose, but it has more challenges than benefits.

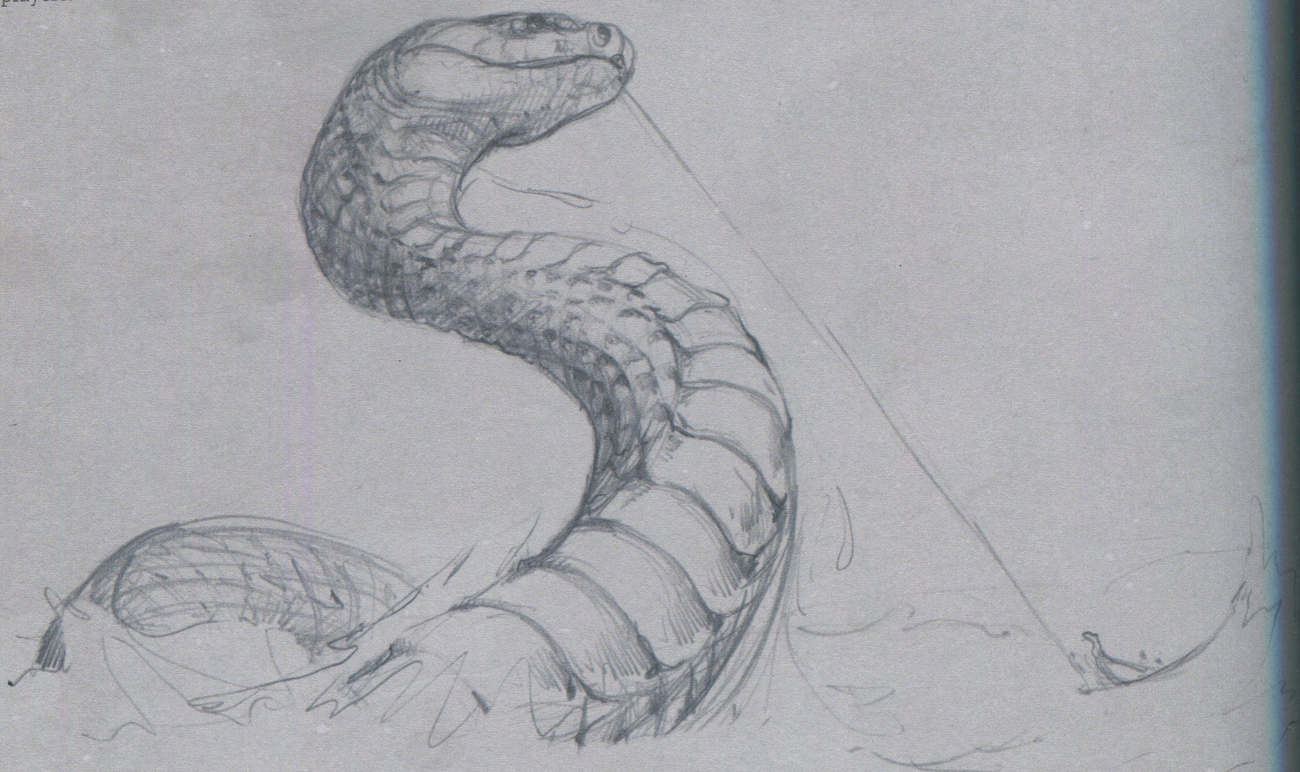


Poses

In this first sketch I explored showing Jörmungandr lying on the ocean floor in the traditional pose of clutching its tail in its mouth, like an ouroboros. It is an interesting pose to draw and it conveys a sense of size and gives me a place for texture in the foreground. The downside is that it is not particularly dynamic, and foreshortening could obscure the forms of the head in silhouette. If working for a client, it would be worth showing to the art director though, as the face has a lot of character.



The sketch below shows a moment from the folktale of Thor's fishing trip with Hymir, when Thor caught the world serpent on his hook. Jörmungandr actually displays quite well in this pose, with good energy and a dynamic twist as it pulls against the line. However, in a field guide such as this, I need to show Jörmungandr in a minimal environment, and the sketch here is very much a narrative with other players.



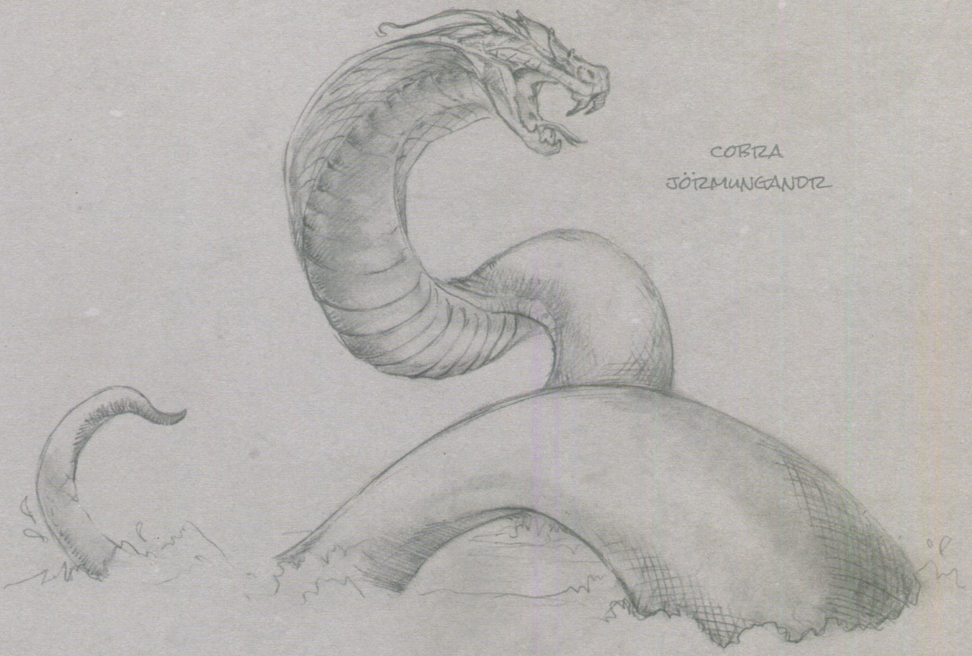
• SUBSPECIES •

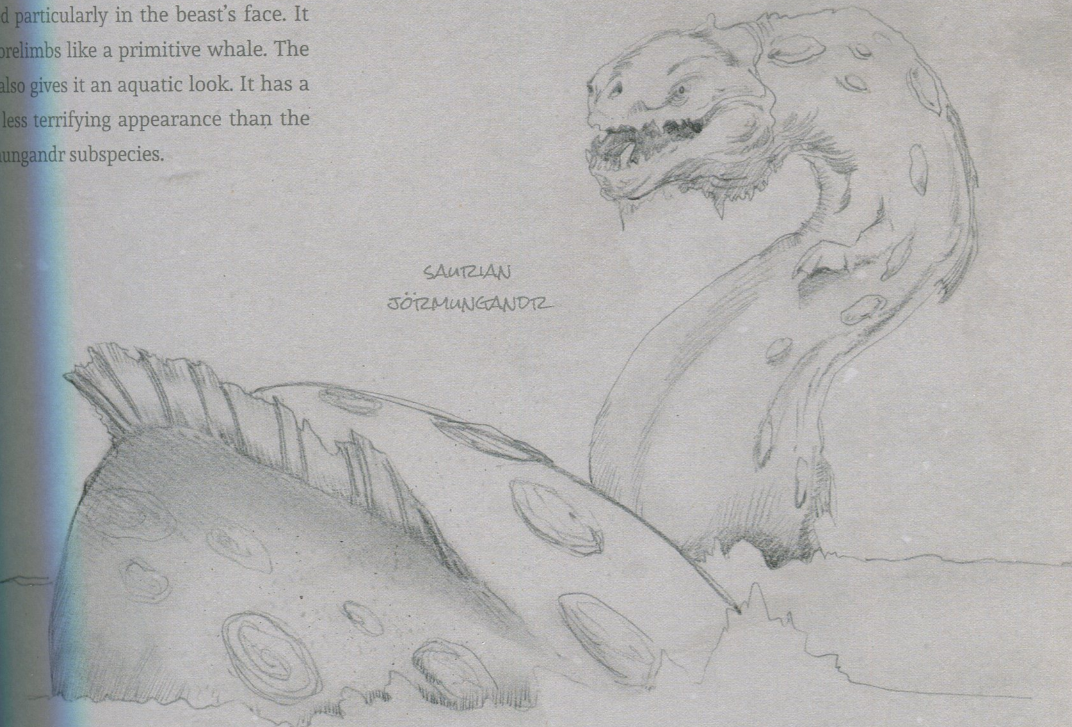
Cobra Jörmungandr

Cobra Jörmungandr is a poisonous, evil-looking serpent, slender and writhing. Hooded like a cobra, its head is long and dragonesque, emphasizing its evil nature. Even at a distance, the fangs are visible, demonstrating how large they are. Note also the effect of atmospheric perspective on a creature of this size; even quite large scales will become invisible with distance, unless they are so large that they interfere with movement.

Saurian Jörmungandr

Saurian Jörmungandr is a primordial, ancient creature that has spent centuries lying at the bottom of ocean trenches, ragged and crusted with nameless corals, barnacles, and weeds. It is bulky and primitive, a contrast to the twisting anatomy of the classic and cobra Jörmungandr. Sauria is a class of reptile, traditionally linked to lizards, and saurian qualities can be observed particularly in the beast's face. It has little forelimbs like a primitive whale. The dorsal fin also gives it an aquatic look. It has a more fun, less terrifying appearance than the other Jörmungandr subspecies.

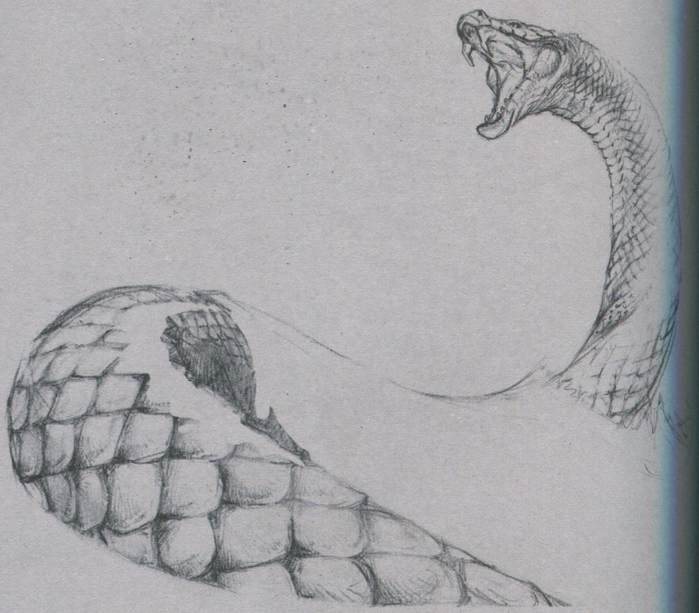


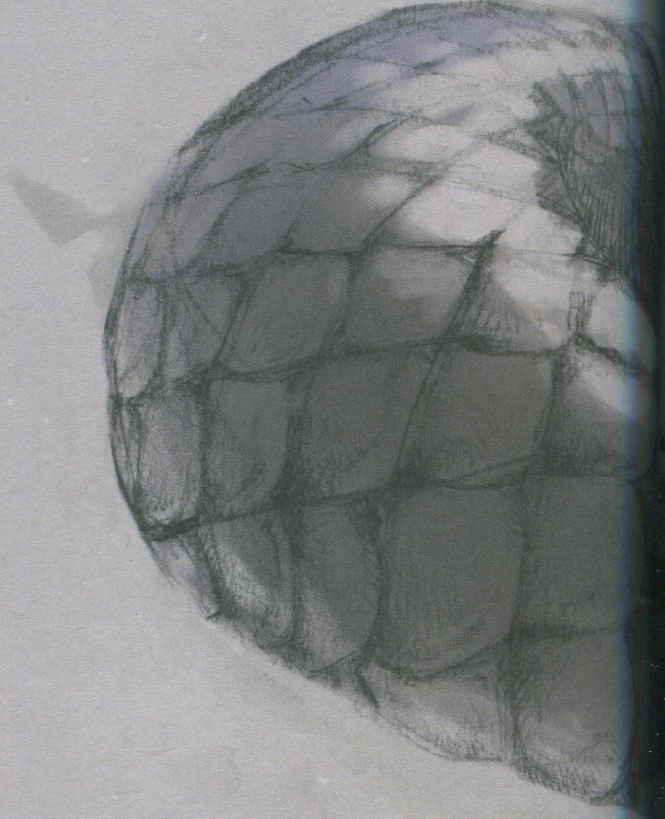


• FINAL DESIGN •

Here is the final portrait of Jörmungandr. It is large, aquatic, evil, and venomous. Scales can be seen through the sheets of water rolling down his neck and his fangs are prominently displayed. I have not included any additional elements for scale – a snake capable of wrapping itself around the globe is likely to dwarf any human or artifact to invisibility – but I kept the point of view very low and atmospheric perspective creates a distinct haze over the farther points of the beast.

I kept the head and eyes small, and the body dark and without noticeable pattern. My goal was to keep the viewer's eye sliding over the curves of the snake, up to the head, for a sense of threatening movement. My main reason for placing a length of tail in the foreground was to give myself somewhere to explore surface texture close-up. The size of the scales allows for lots of twisting and reflected light.

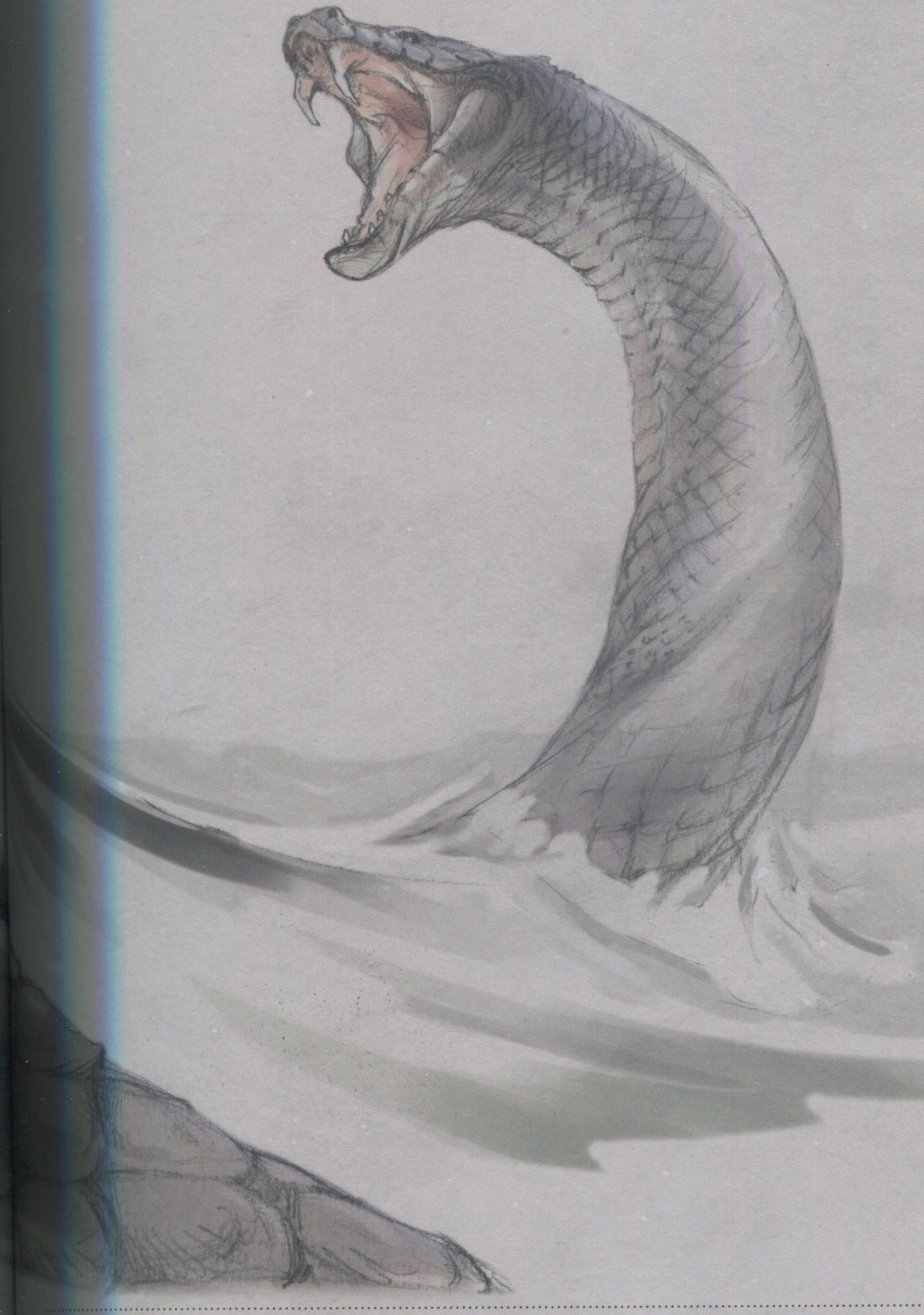


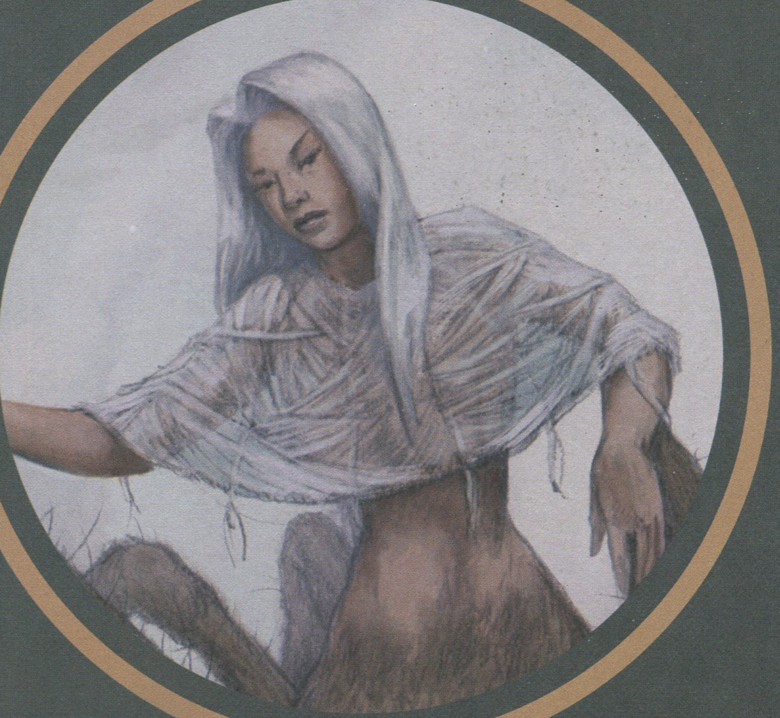


Key facts

Name: Jörmungandr
Taxonomy: Snake
Region: Northern Europe
Habitat: Oceans
Mythical abilities: Venomous, colossal size
Threat to humans: 4

Final image © Heather Hudson





• JORŌGUMO •

In Japanese, folklore Jorōgumo is a magical spider who can transform itself into an attractive female in order to lure male victims that it will later consume. Classed as a type of yōkai – a magical being like a ghost or a monster in Japanese folklore – Jorōgumo can be roughly translated as "binding bride," as the beast is known to tie up its victims with silk spider thread. Visually it is sometimes depicted as half-woman, half-spider. Some believe that when a spider reaches 400 years old it develops mythical powers that allow it to transform when it is in search of a meal. There is in fact an actual spider known as the Jorō spider (the nephila clavata), which is found in most parts of Japan and can create a web up to a meter wide. Legends of Jorōgumo often link the creature to water and waterfalls.

• RANDY GALLEGOS •

Illustrator • gallegosart.com

FIELD NOTES •

pinnerets

part of my research I take a close look at the fferent elements of spiders. A spinneret is an gan a spider uses to spin silk. The number of inneret s a spider has can vary, but they generally pear on the rear of the creature. As binding her ctim in silk thread is a key part of the Jorōgumo ory, I want to make sure I am familiar with the ucture and arrangement of the spinnerets.

helicerae

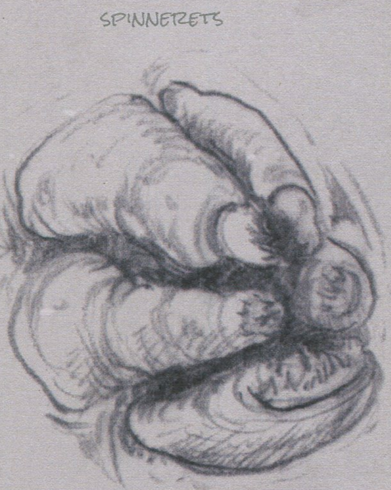
he chelicerae are a spider's mouth parts, with ach one comprised of two components: one that ouses venom and the fang that injects the venom. uscles allow a spider to move the chelicerae hen biting or showing aggression. Being able detail these means I can ensure the spider art of Jorōgumo looks menacing. Many spiders, uch as tarantulas and wolf spiders, have fur on heir chelicerae, which would give Jorōgumo a articularly beastly appearance.

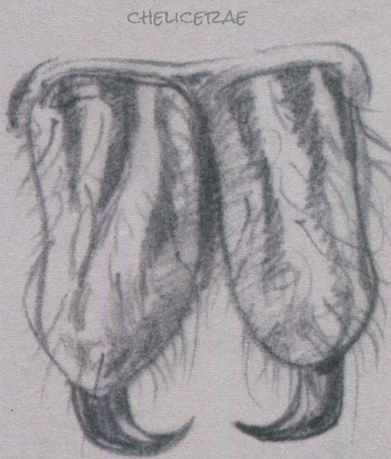
Cephalothorax

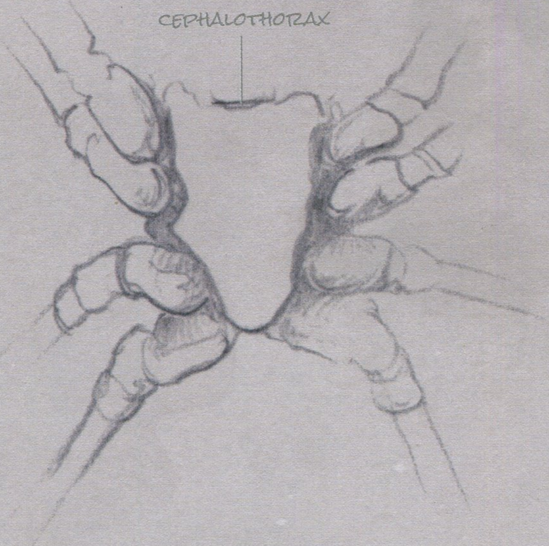
n basic terms, a spider is made up of two ortions: the abdomen and the cephalothorax. he cephalothorax is a fused head and thorax. The ight legs attach to the cephalothorax, so I sketch n underside view of this to understand how the ea works. Arachnid anatomy has an almost alien eel to it, which could give the final design a creepy, nearthly quality.

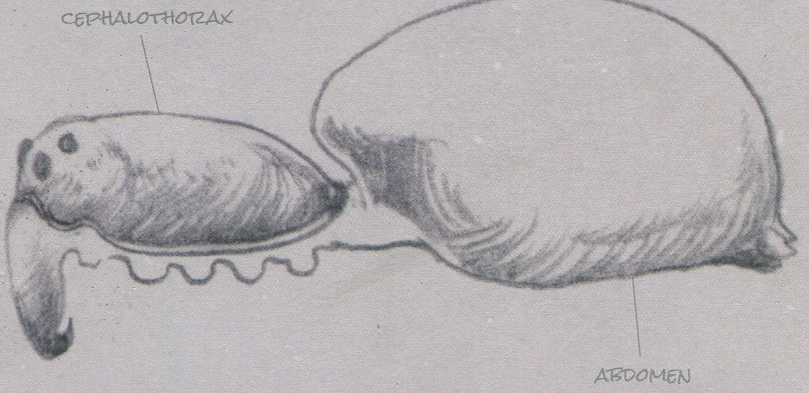
Abdomen

n this final sketch you can see both the ephalothorax and abdomen from a side view; omitted the legs here so I could study the body hape more closely. Spiders with a more bulbous bdomen have a very intimidating look. As the yes and mouth parts are on the cephalothorax of a pider, I think I would prefer to develop the human ement from this head end of the beast. However, he design could end up looking quite top heavy ike this, so a larger abdomen will help to balance hat out.









Spider eyes

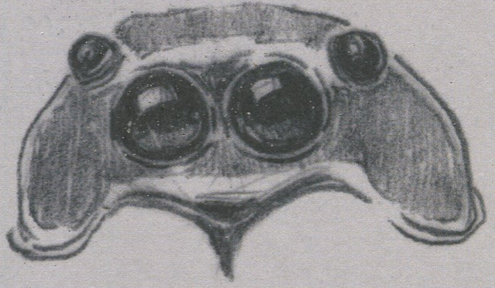
Spiders' eyes come in a few configurations and numbers. When constructing my creature, I would like to mix and match among various spiders' features to try to create something that is not necessarily any one kind of spider, but which carries some of the best aspects of various types. The notes on these sketches will therefore discuss key elements to keep in mind.

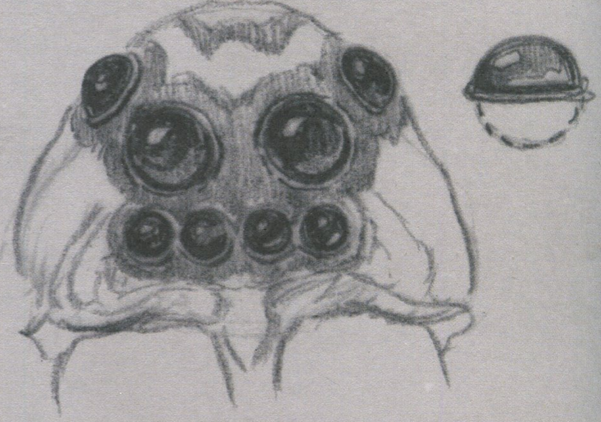
The eyes are universally haloed by a form of eyelid, which upon closer inspection is delineated by small hairs in a spiral formation around each eye. At a distance, the specific hairs won't be seen, but a sort of outline becomes apparent. It is important not to simply draw a solid ring around the eye; breaking up the line will give it a more natural feel.

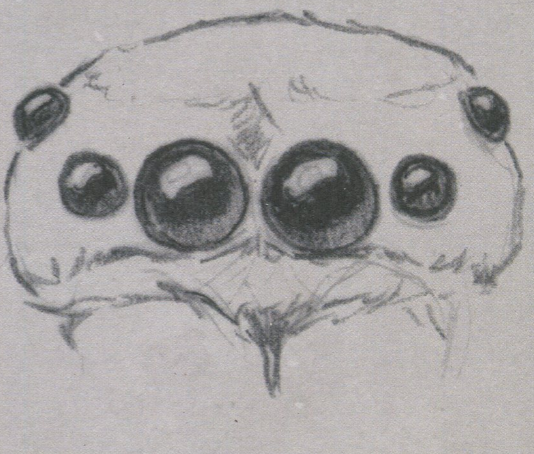
The eyes themselves are almost half exposed, and as not all of the eyes are on the forward plane of the head, but at an angle – usually to the sides and slightly above – some of the eyes will always be viewed at an angle, even in a frontal view. It is therefore important to know that the eyes protrude so that I draw them appropriately bulbous on the head where needed.

The eyes are glossy and nearly opaque. They reveal a sharp specular highlight; I make sure I add this highlight in the same place for all eyes that would receive the same light source. Eyes on the opposite side of the head may carry a highlight in a different location. It is important to direct this highlight in a manner consistent with the rest of the way the creature is lit.

Different configurations will read differently at different sizes. The top spider head has a slightly comical, almost cute aspect to it, with very large central dark eyes that are commonly used in cartoons for certain animals or creatures to make them look infantile. This is inappropriate for the Jorōgumo design, which I imagine to be sinister looking. The middle set features most of the eyes on the frontal plane but could be a little confusing, especially if viewed at a reduced size. The last arrangement maintains the frontal large eyes, but with smaller eyes on the side of the head; this takes the focus off the center two eyes a bit, so it reads as multiples but does not confuse as much.


DETAILING THE "EYELIDS"


OBSERVING THE BULBOUS NATURE OF THE EYES FROM A FRONTAL VIEW

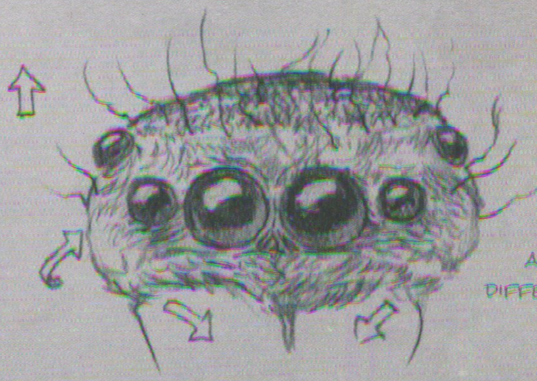

CONSIDERING THE PLACEMENT OF THE EYES TO BEST SUIT THE DESIGN

Spider hair

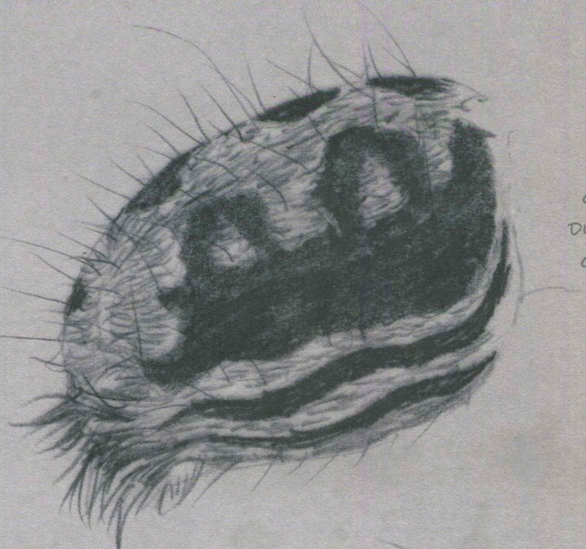
All spiders seem to have some amount of hair. Even glossy spiders, which are glossy primarily due to a largely bare exoskeleton, still have a few long, wiry hairs. On the head, you can note a number of well-defined but tiny hairs which grow around the form of the head in fairly consistent directions. Identifying these gives a more naturalistic feel than simply assuming all the hair grows in a single direction. Note that even among these short, tight hairs, you can still see long wiry ones scattered throughout.

The abdomen of the spider, if it has markings and is not glossy, has patterns defined by colored hairs. These hairs tend to be softer looking across many species, becoming longer and more fur-like around the spinnerets. Likewise, long thin hairs protrude underneath.

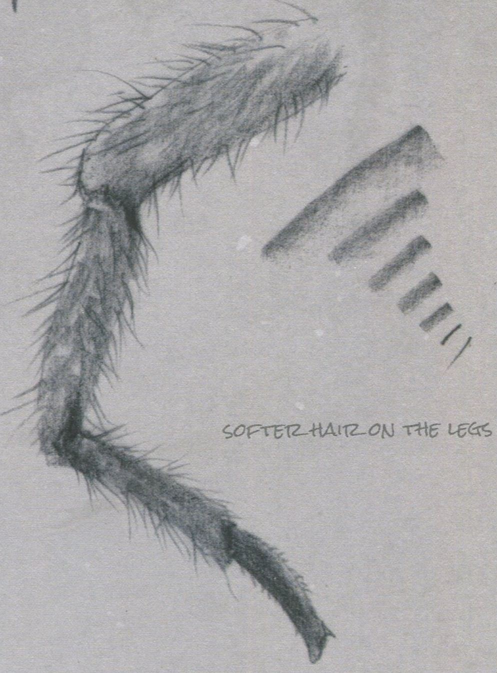
When hairy, the legs can often have some of the softest-looking fur. Varying the texture from long and thin to the softest can be achieved by angling your pencil to use the edge of the lead; as you raise the angle you get heavier-edged lines. Rotating your pencil slightly will often expose the razor-edge of the angle you were just drawing with – I use that sharpest edge to draw the long hairs quickly and confidently to prevent them from lacking energy.



ADDING HAIR IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS



OBSERVING THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF FUR ON THE ABDOMEN



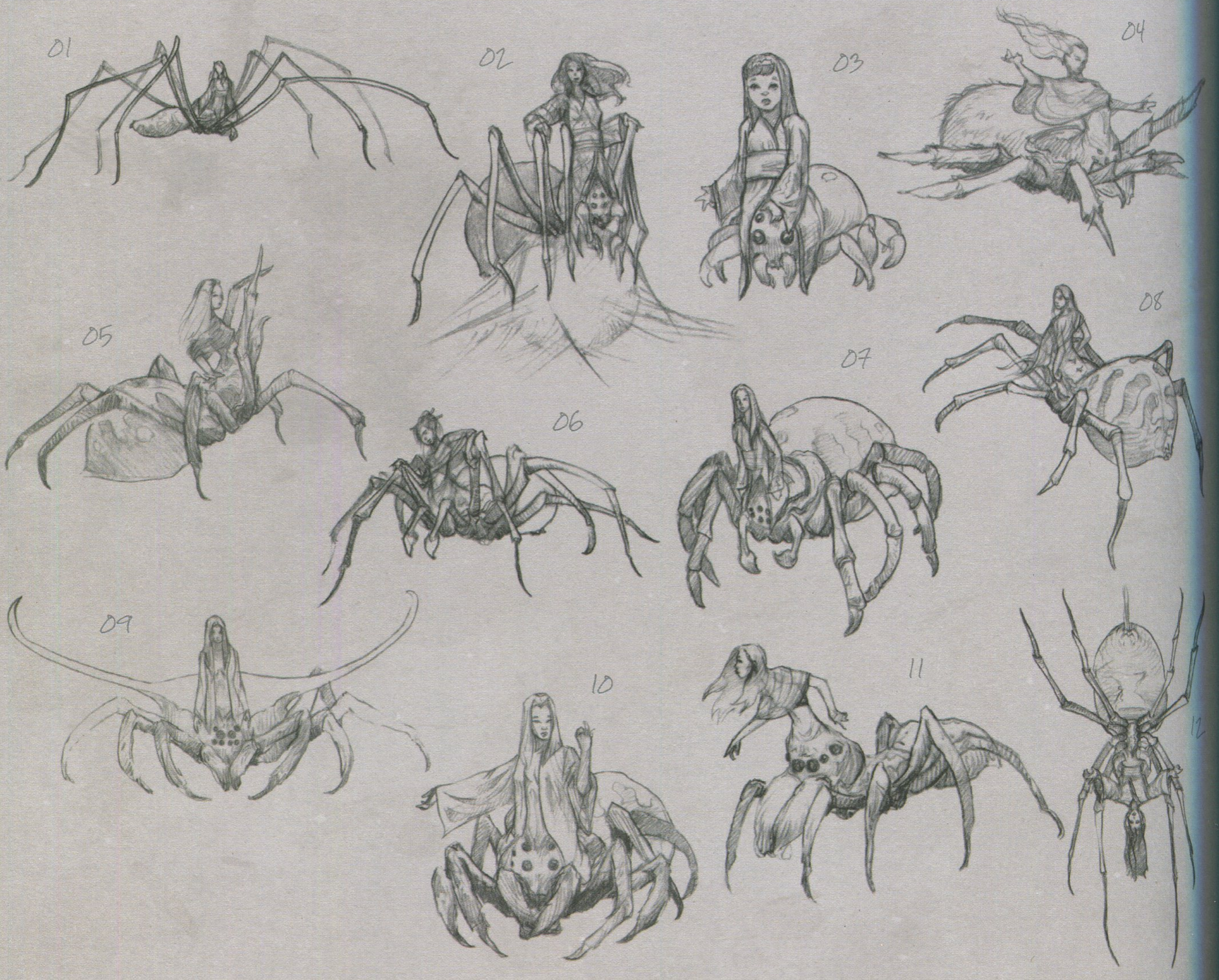
SOFTER HAIR ON THE LEGS

• DESIGN PROCESS •

Thumbnails

During the thumbnail stage I experimented with and explored the creature's portrayal. While Jorōgumo is traditionally associated with a particular kind of arachnid in Japan, spiders come in many varieties, and the wide range of shapes lend themselves to different compositions. I therefore played around with different types. Thumbnails 01, 11, and 09 portray Jorōgumo as a "daddy long-legs," the rather odd ant spider, and the crab spider, respectively. While these probably won't feature as a final design, they help me to think of the creature as a species generally. This led me to think about their life cycle. Jorōgumo may lay an egg sac, as in thumbnail 02, perhaps with just three to four babies; this makes me think about what a toddler would look like (thumbnail 03). From there I continue with some further adult explorations.

Traditionally, in human form the Jorōgumo woman wears a kimono of some kind. When closed, as in thumbnails 02, 03, 07, and 12, the kimono makes it look like the figure is just sitting on top of the spider, even though clearly below the waist the robe splits and reveals the spider eyes. This double-headed look is creepy and I intend to keep that, but the closed robe is problematic. To solve that and show the figure emerging from the spider body, I play with an open robe (thumbnails 09 and 10) and a sort of wrap or shawl that I imagine to be made of gossamer web (thumbnails 04, 05, and 08).



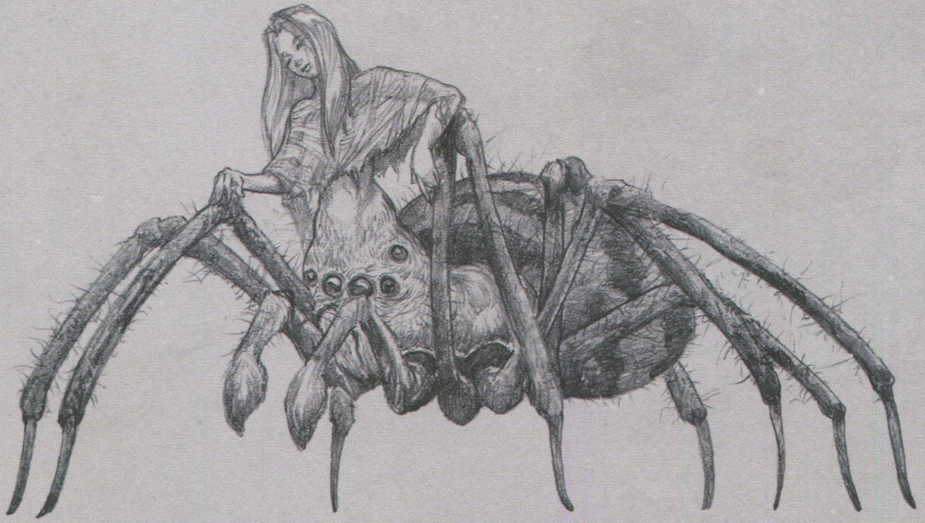
Further exploration

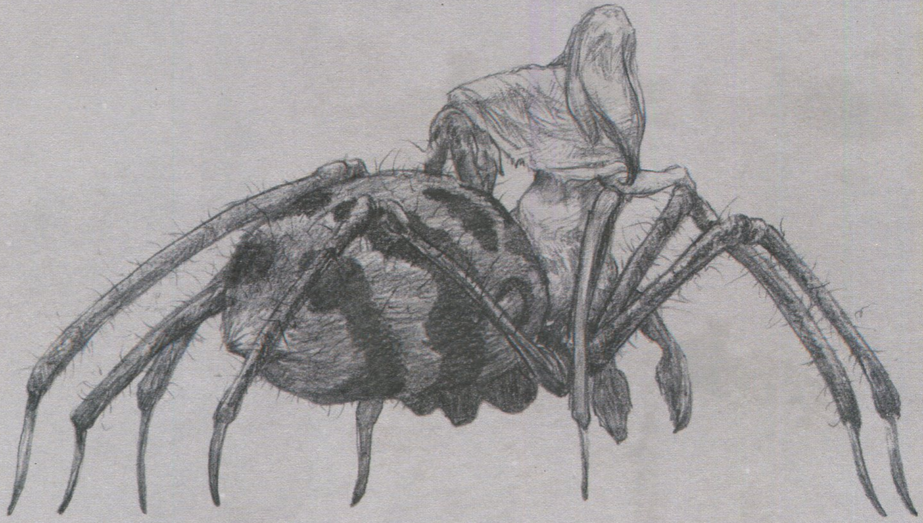
After the thumbnail stage I chose to move forward with a design similar to thumbnail 06 as I liked the relative scale of the human-to-arachnid proportions; it doesn't look like it is just a case of a woman sitting on a spider. I decided that white hair was a good look, echoing the appearance of webs and acting as a counterpoint to a dark spider body.

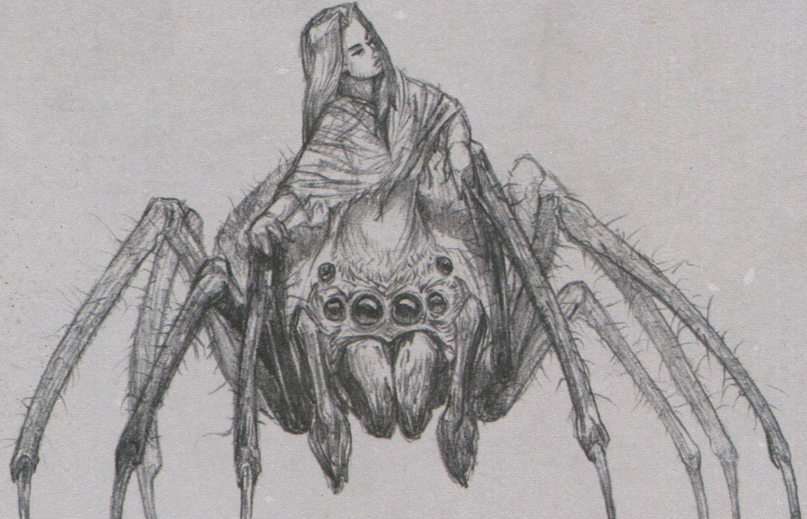
When producing the turnaround views shown here, it was helpful to put the creature's feet on a flat plane. From the front three-quarter view the legs and their hairs create an interesting and spine-tingling silhouette. I gave the furry body stripes for a predatory look. The pedipalps (the two shorter appendages you can see at the front, which are used as sensory organs) block the view of the fangs slightly, so if I use this angle in the final design I will need to adjust their position slightly.

To sketch the view from behind, I took a shortcut by mirroring the previous drawing and tracing over the silhouette. It still required imagining what was behind overlapping forms and adjusting the human and spider bodies, but it saved considerable effort when it came to the legs. From this view you can see the formation of the spinnerets and how the woman leans on the spider's legs; she looks slightly uncomfortable, which gives the yōkai an unnatural, twisted feel.

Sketching a direct frontal view, as shown on the right here, forced me to deal with some difficulties with the woman's angle and arms, which I will adjust further before taking the image to the final stage. From this perspective you can get a clear view of the terrifying eyes and fangs.



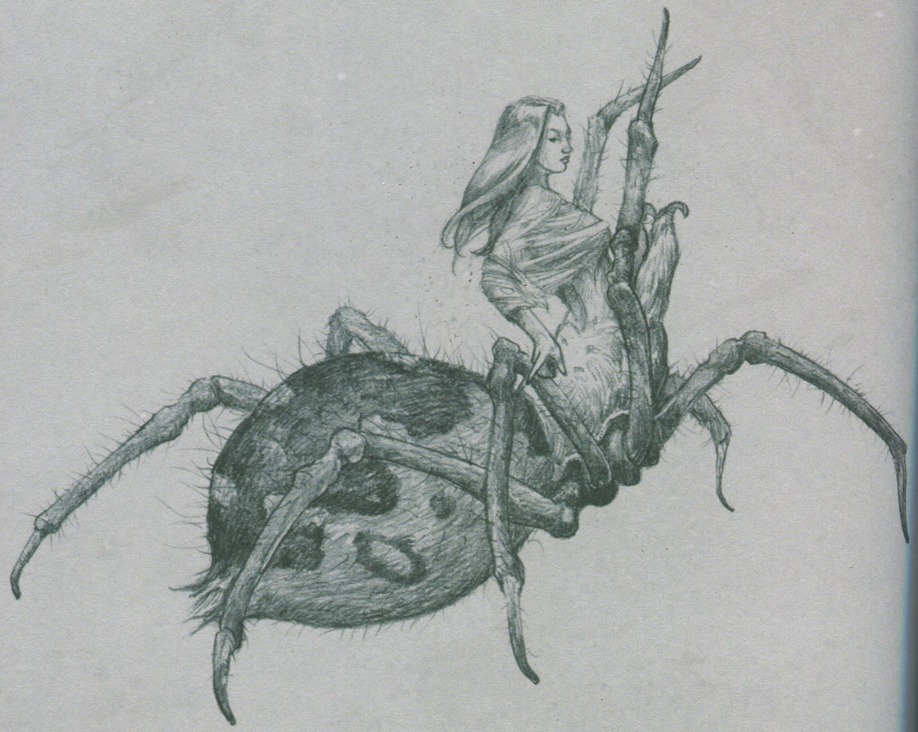


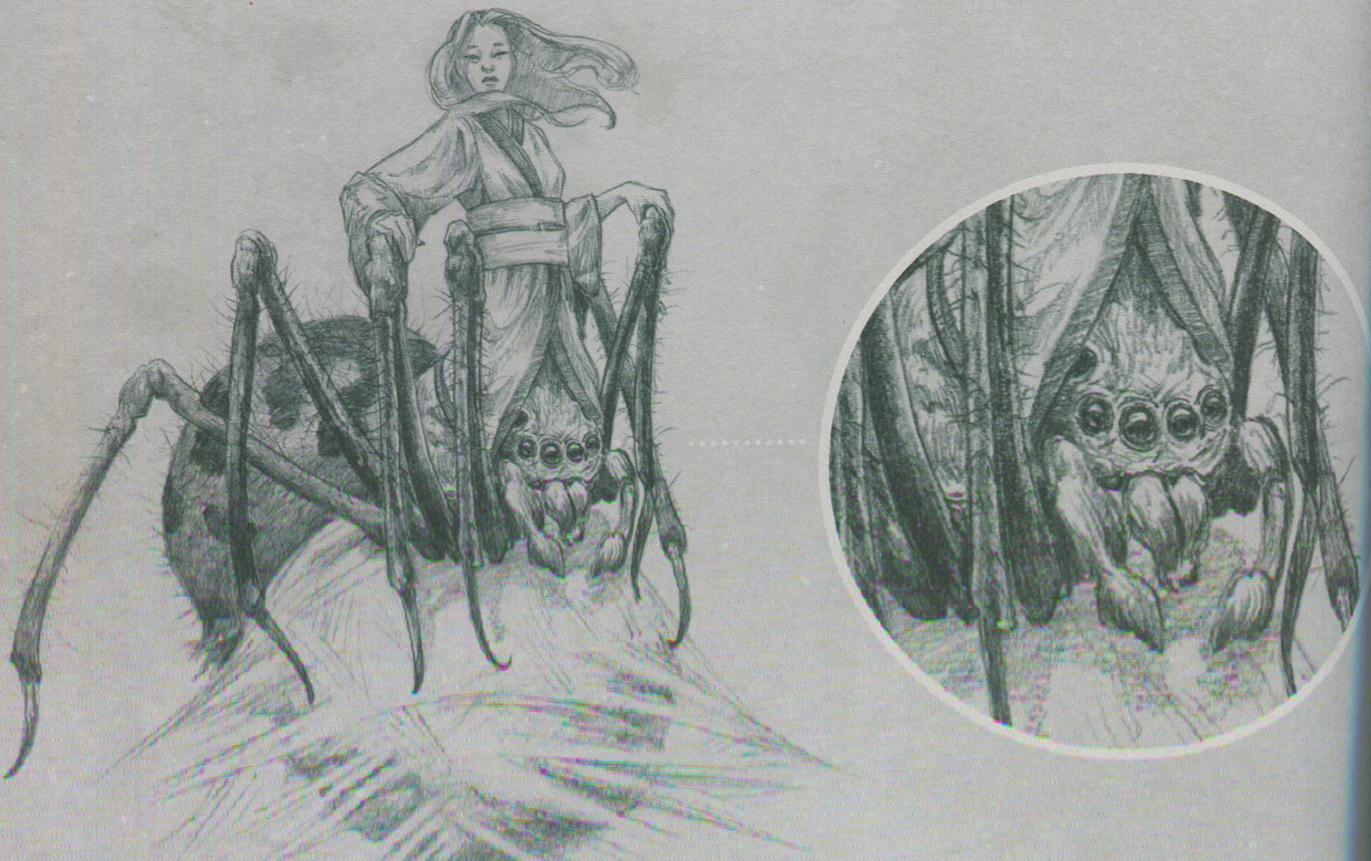


Poses

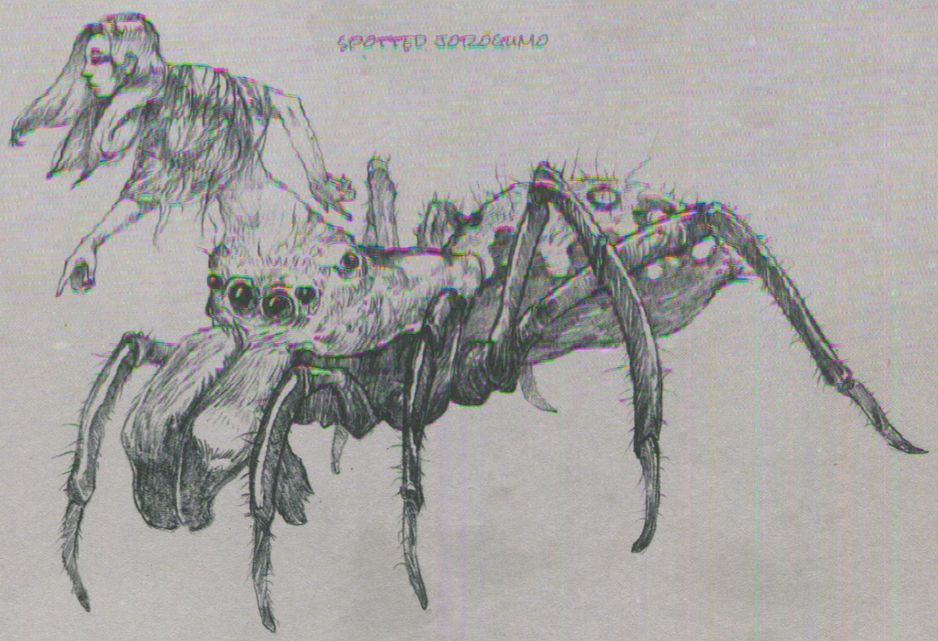
In the first sketch shown here I explored the design in an aggressive pose, with its front legs and fangs raised in intimidation. Slyly looking to the side, the woman maintains her seductive charms in this situation. I like the movement and the way her hair flows in this pose. However, I think the spider eyes are too important a feature to leave out.

I then sketched Jorōgumo protecting an egg sac, which you can see below. I wanted to try giving her a more regal look so this pose shows her with her head held high and "standing" up tall. I tried the closed kimono one more time as it conveys the Japanese influence more clearly. However, it still makes it look as though she is simply riding the spider and the creature's face is just peeking out beneath her gown.





• SUBSPECIES •

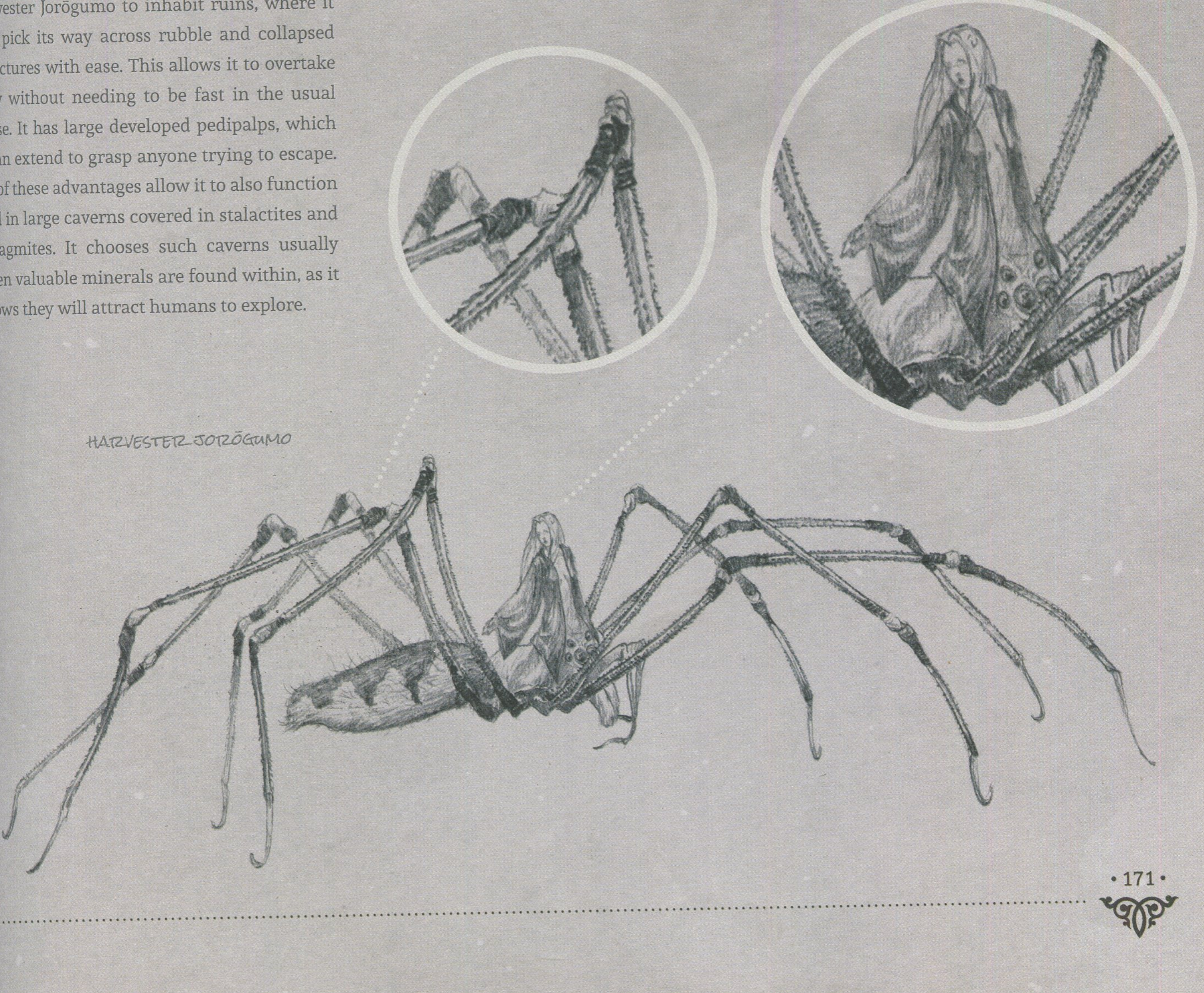


Spotted Jorōgumo

Powerfully built, with a significant predatory aspect, this form of Jorōgumo likely populates dry, arid regions. While the common Jorōgumo is typically associated with waterfalls, the spotted Jorōgumo's existence in dusty flatlands, where they live in holes in the ground, make them an unexpected foe. Able to chase down prey with a nearly unbelievable speed, their feminine lure can also be heightened by making their human aspects peek over brush or boulders. Once a hapless traveler approaches, the attack would likely occur before they could react to defend themselves.

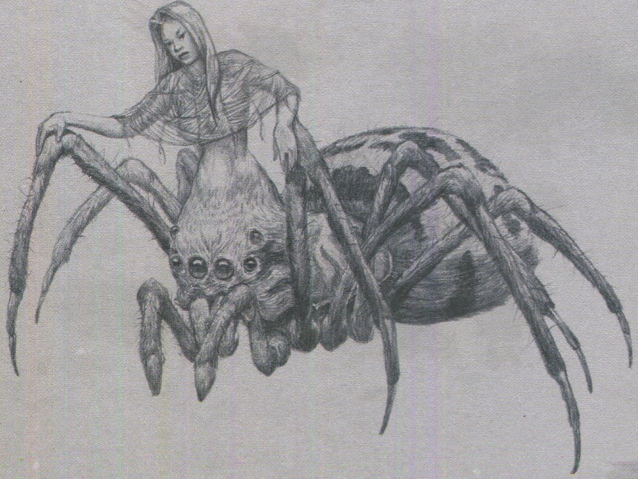
Harvester Jorōgumo

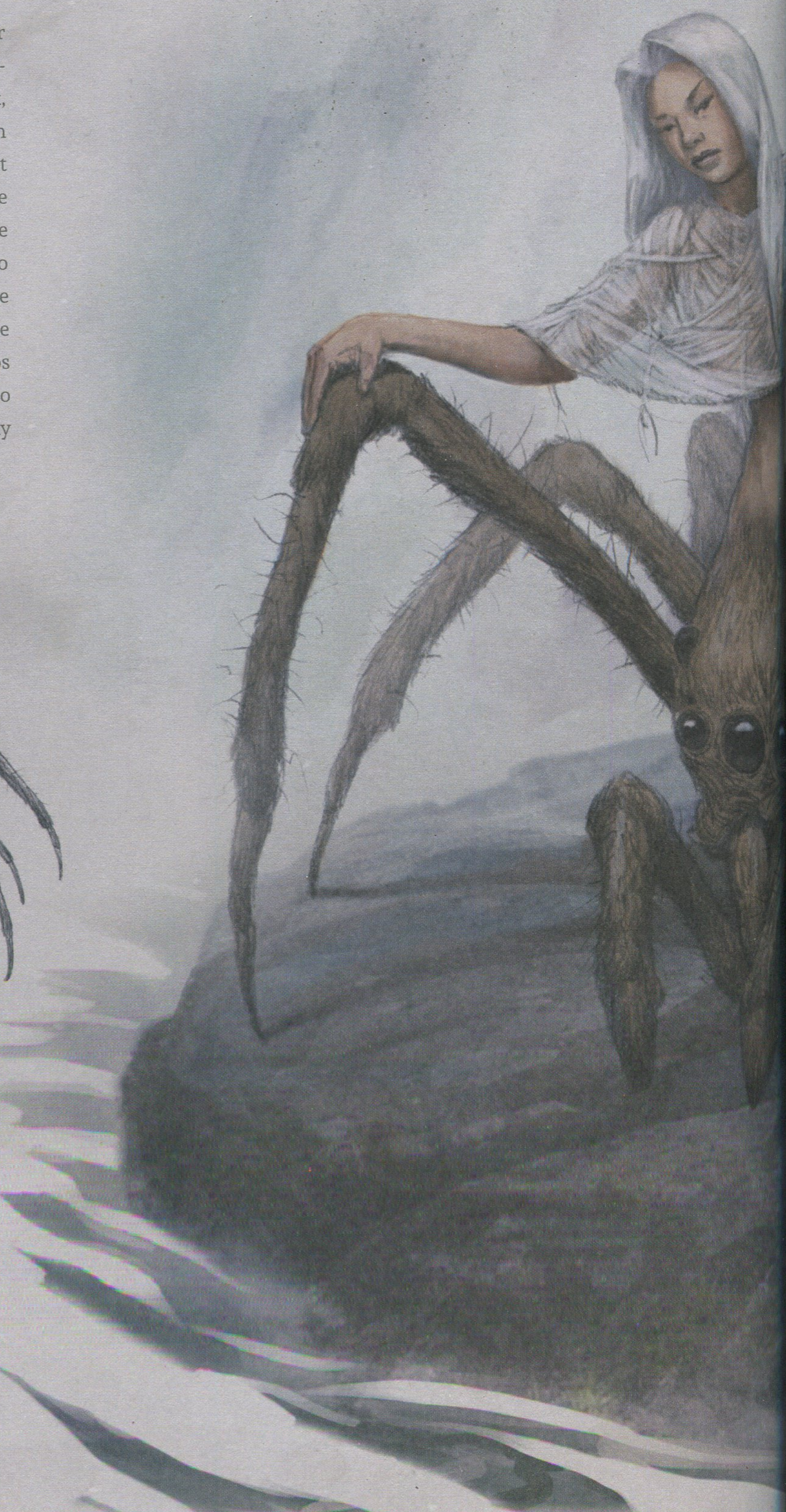
Its extremely long legs allow the ungainly harvester Jorōgumo to inhabit ruins, where it can pick its way across rubble and collapsed structures with ease. This allows it to overtake prey without needing to be fast in the usual sense. It has large developed pedipalps, which it can extend to grasp anyone trying to escape. All of these advantages allow it to also function well in large caverns covered in stalactites and stalagmites. It chooses such caverns usually when valuable minerals are found within, as it knows they will attract humans to explore.



• FINAL DESIGN •

In the final image of Jorōgumo you can see the slender female torso emerging from above the spider's eyes in a well-integrated design. The woman's white hair and translucent, silk thread clothing give her an ethereal appearance in contrast to the spider's earthy tones. The large, dark eyes wait for the opportunity to start binding the victim. The fangs are slightly more visible in this final design, which reminds the viewer that a meal is on its way. I like the hairiness of Jorōgumo as it creates a beastly, predatory look that works well with the patterning. The arched legs create a pleasing reflection of the triangular mound on top of the creature's head that develops into the woman's torso. As traditional Jorōgumo tales relate to water and drowning, I have suggested a waterfall and rocky pool as an environment.

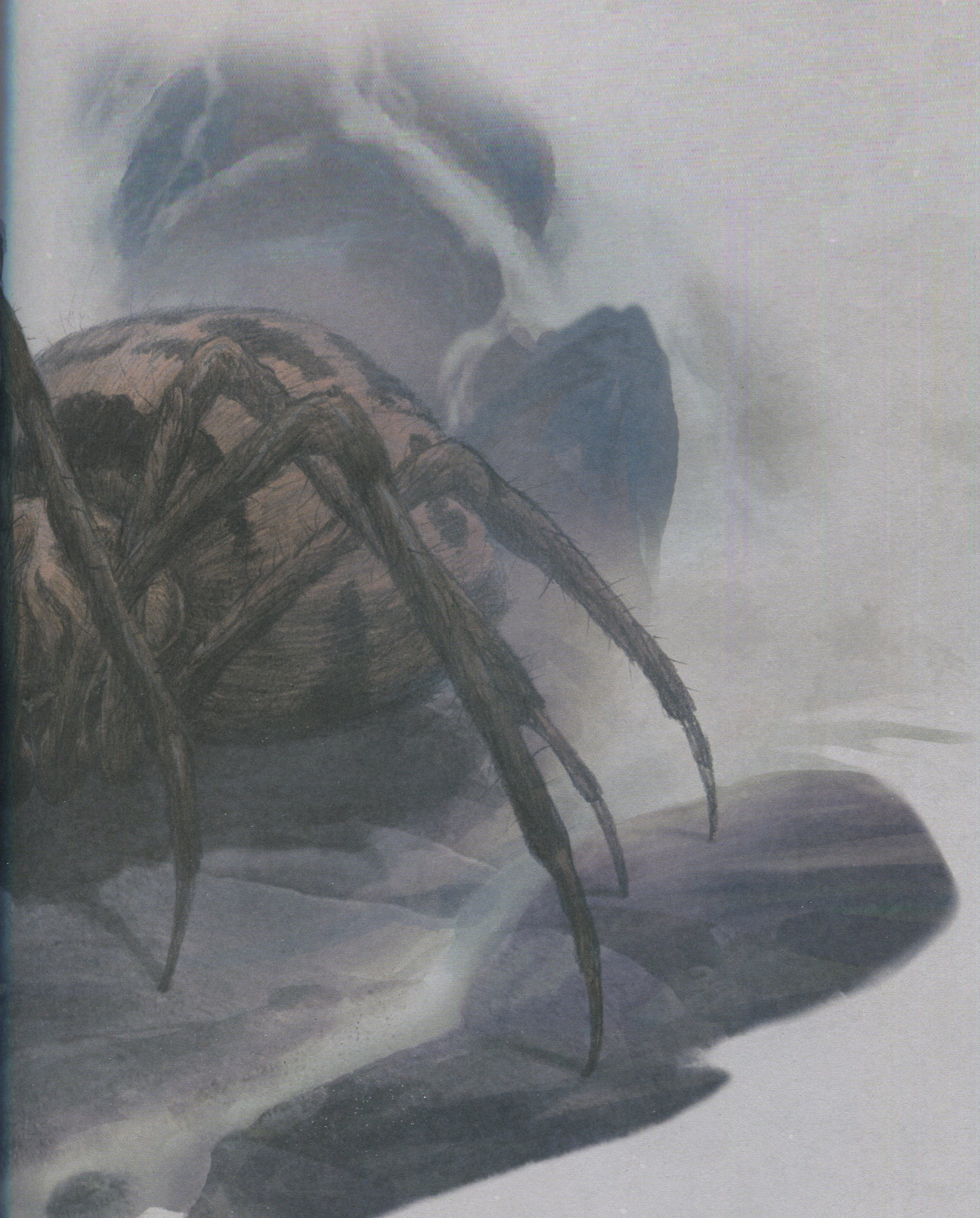


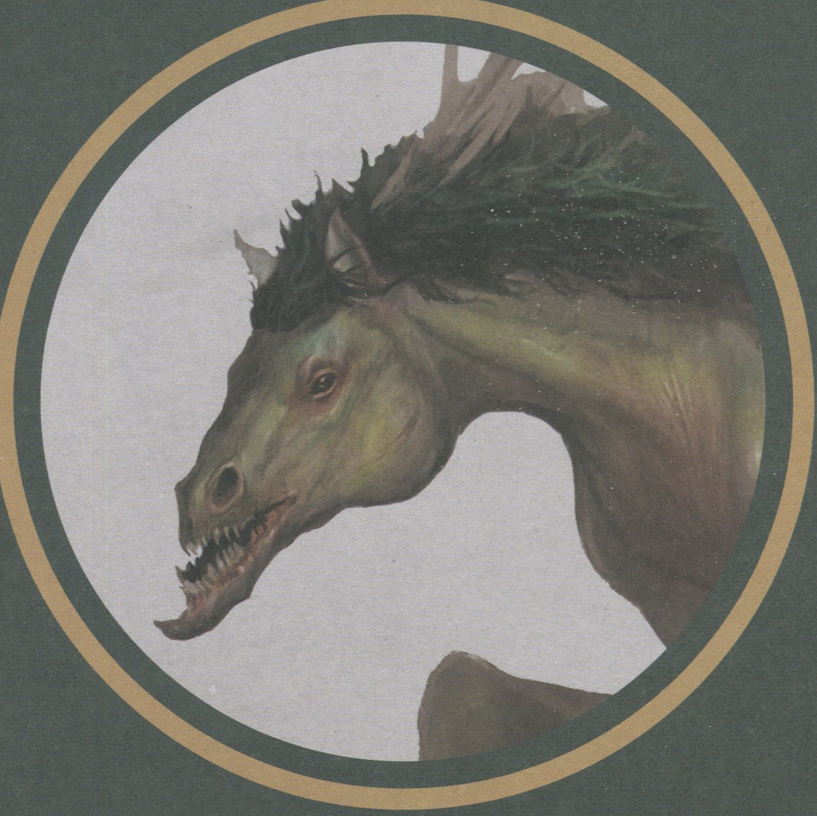


Key facts

Name: Jorōgumo
Taxonomy: Spider, human
Region: Japan
Habitat: Near areas of water
Mythical abilities: Shapeshifter
Threat to humans: 5

Final image © Randy Gallegos





• KELPIE •

The kelpie is a shapeshifting demon in the form of a horse found in Scottish folklore. There are many tales of the kelpie inhabiting almost every major body of water in Scotland. Countless folktales surround the actions of a kelpie and the origins. Throughout history, the kelpie would take the form of a handsome man and lure women to its lair. It was then that the kelpie would drown its victims, devour them, and leave their entrails on the embankments. Some folktales describe the kelpie as a malevolent water horse originating from ancient human sacrifices. These sacrifices were made to appease the gods associated with water. The idea of the kelpie being a waterborne demon was formed centuries ago to help keep children away from deep water. The tales also encouraged women not to trust handsome and mysterious men. In art, the kelpie is often portrayed as a poolside maiden.

• BOBBY REBHOLZ •

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• FIELD NOTES •

Horses

Studying the head of a horse is crucial in making sure this creature maintains its mythological origins. A lot of artwork portrays a kelpie in its human form. But for this design, I want to make sure the horse head is well represented. The jaw line is important because I need it to be pronounced and powerful. Having a strong jaw line helps with the presence of a creature.

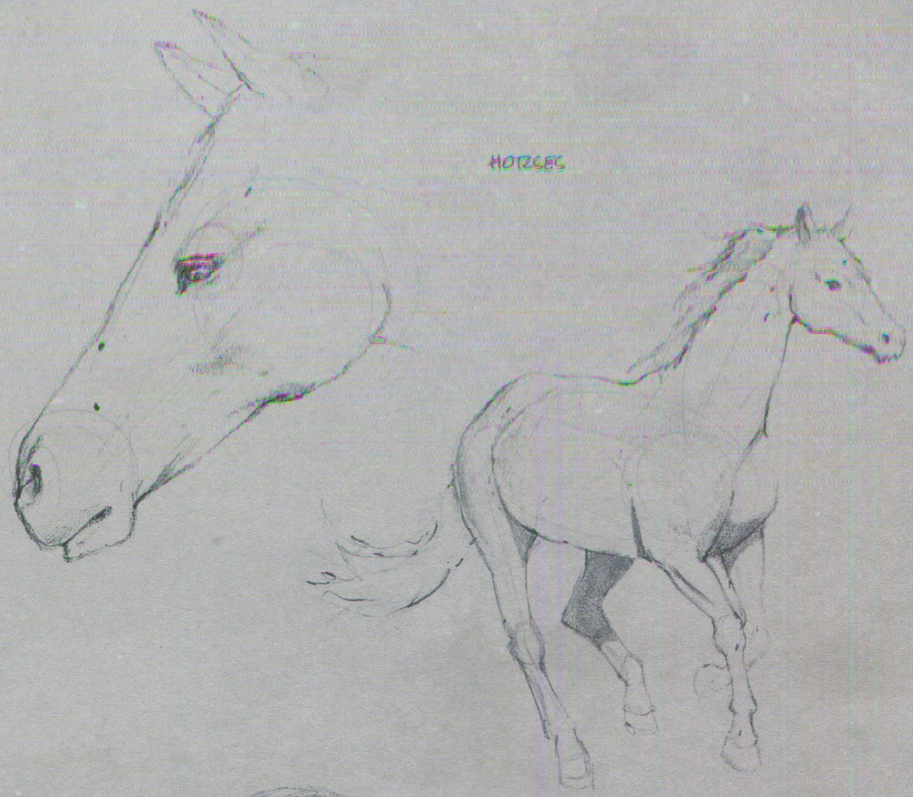
The body of a horse is beautiful, and even though I will be designing a rather horrific creature, the underlying horse structure needs to be intact. The viewer needs to feel a sense of familiarity and believability in order for this entire creature to work. Here I sketch a horse's body, mainly for the muscle structure. I will look to morph fins and a tail into the body later.

Lionfish

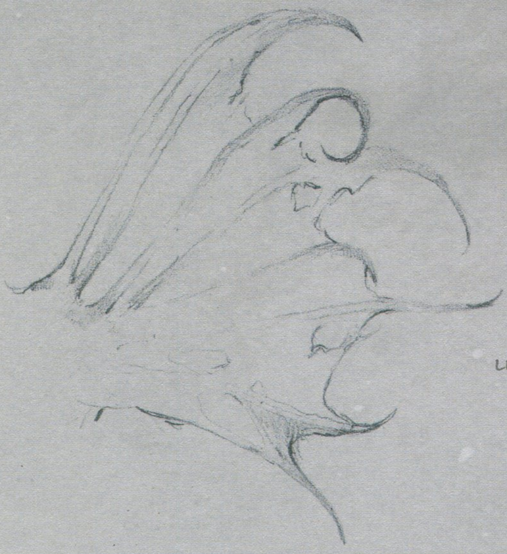
Aquatic features are prominent in this myth so I sketch fish fins from real life to try to get a feel for how they grow. I immediately start thinking of a horse with fins. But this is not a horse with basic fins plopped into the design; the fins need to be organic in nature and add to the creepiness factor. I study the elongated fins from lionfish because of how intimidating they look.

Lizards

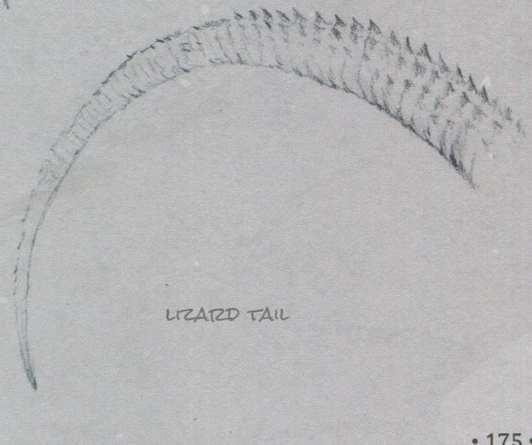
I look at tails of lizards because this could offer both a marshland feel and the sense of a demonic reptile. I begin sketching the tail of the iguana but I need to be careful; I am not sketching a lizard for the kelpie's design so I need to make sure the tail is shown as a design feature rather than the main focus. This particular lizard is intriguing because of how dragonesque it looks. I think it would be very interesting to add reptile or dragon elements to the kelpie design.



HORSES



LIONFISH TAIL



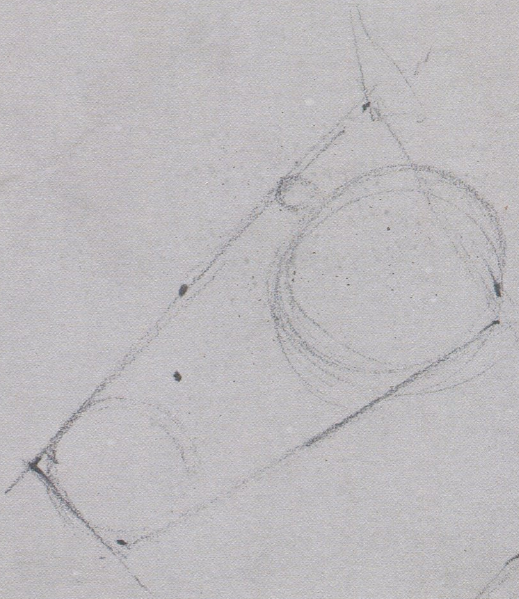
LIZARD TAIL

Horse's head

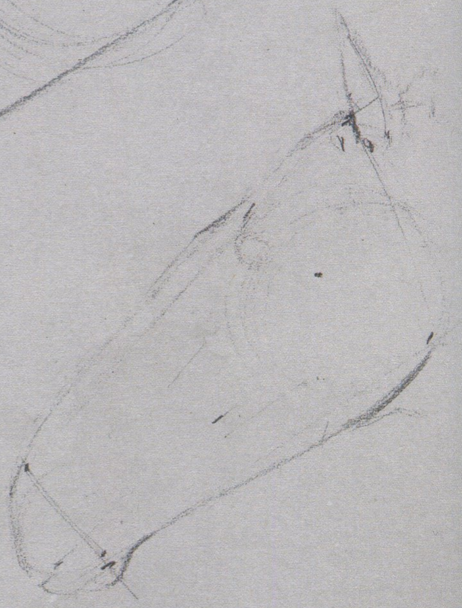
One of the most important things to remember when sketching a horse's head is the underlying skull. I see beginner concept artists forgetting this step when sketching animals and creatures in general. I make sure I look at the large forms of the horse's head first, such as the powerful jaw, elongated snout, and overall triangular shape from the back of the head to the lips, starting with lightly drawn oval shapes. At this stage, the construction lines should be drawn lightly to avoid having to erase too much later when details are added.

Once the ovals and triangular shape are drawn, I observe how the skull and muscles connect to form the overall outline of the head. I keep the outline pronounced while all of the small ridges of muscle and shadow are only hinted at. I avoid going into too much detail at this point, even though it is enticing. The oval shapes can still be seen. As you practice this method, there will be a time when you won't need to draw any ovals; you will be able to see the shapes mentally. It all comes with repetition.

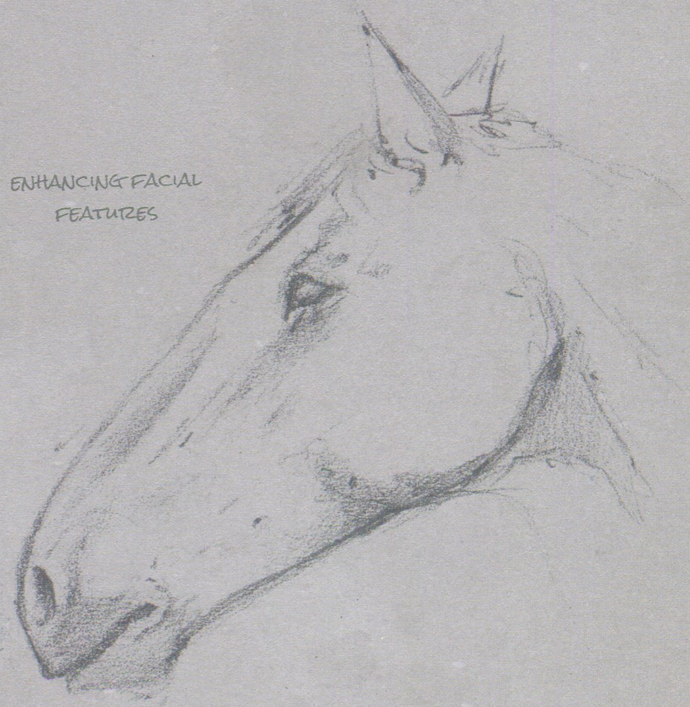
I can then start to add small details to enhance certain features. For example, I apply darker lines at the mouth crease, nostril, eye, and shadows of larger muscles. I still need to keep this subtle because it is too easy to go overboard and start adding in details that aren't needed. Make sure that when you add in shading, it defines specific areas that are needed to make the structure believable. I make sure that the underside of the jaw line and mouth receive a darker treatment, as did the muscle ridges in the face.



KEEPING THE SKULL IN MIND



ADDING MUSCULATURE



ENHANCING FACIAL FEATURES

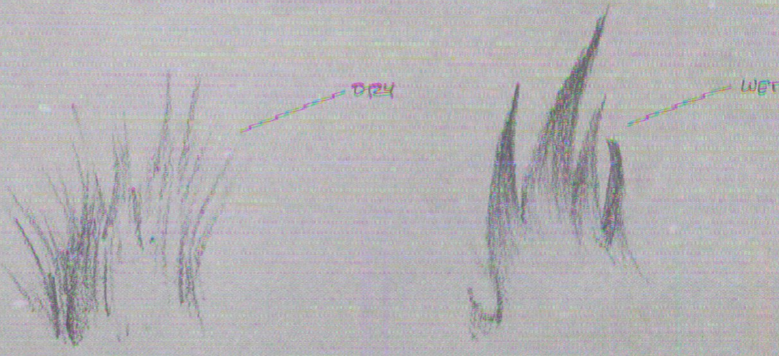
Wet fur

Drawing wet fur, which I will need for the mane, can be tricky. More often than not, artists will draw hair and fur with every single little strand. While that might be accurate in a literal sense, it is a waste of time because you can convey the fur with larger shapes. In the studies on the right you can see what dry and wet fur looks like without a lot of detail. Wet or dry, fur grows together closely enough to form clumps. When the fur becomes wet, all of the ends of the tiny hairs stick together into one large point. This "point" can vary in size.

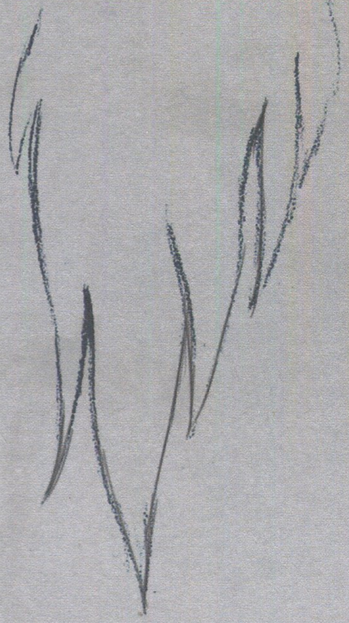
I start by sketching a very light outline of how I want the wet fur to hang. The clumps are pointed and different sizes. The clumps should not look identical because this would prevent the fur from looking organic. You can have fun with this by trying to see how many different directions you can shift the fur. They add up quite quickly and I suddenly have many clumps of wet fur. Remember to sketch lightly at first!

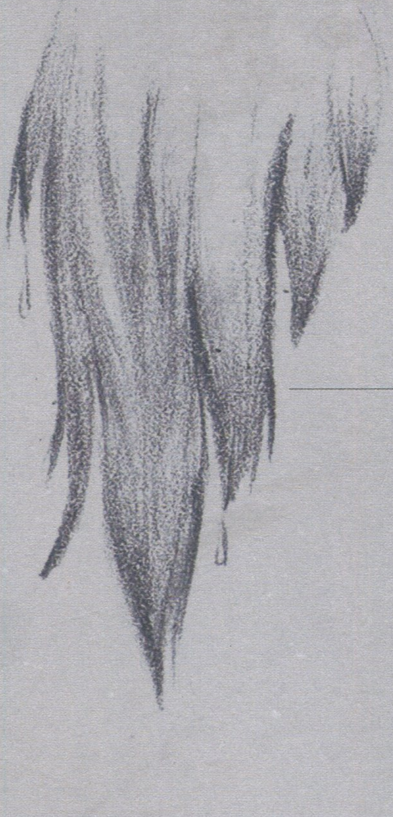
After I establish the clumps of fur, I add shading. The shading should be darkest at the very tips of the clumps. Whenever fur or hair gets wet, the color appears darker because of the way the light bounces off the water and back into the hair. I show this in the sketch by slowly building up value at the tips and moving the shading up the clumps of fur. I make sure I create small breaks where some wet strands of fur don't stick to the larger clumps, as this will make it appear more natural.

STUDYING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WET AND DRY FUR



SKETCHING ORGANIC CLUMPS





USING AN UNDERSTANDING
OF HOW LIGHT BOUNCES OFF
WET HAIR TO ADD SHADING

• DESIGN PROCESS •

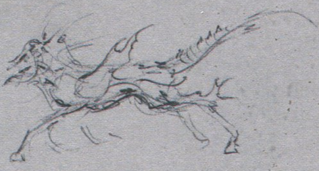
Thumbnails

With the thumbnails, I incorporated the horse body, lizard tail, and gnarly fins of a lionfish. One of the difficult things about the kelpie is that it has a horse's body but needs to live near or in the water. Making the body aquatic looking is challenging considering a horse is a four-legged land mammal. I streamline some of the bodies in these thumbnails to try to give them a fish-like look. Sometimes it works; sometimes it does not. In thumbnails 08 and 11, I simply drew a horse's body and gave it fins here and there. One of the challenges is to avoid making it look simply like a seahorse rather than a mythical creature.

With thumbnail 11, I thickened the fur on the back of the neck to try to bulk up the back, which can make a creature look more intimidating. Making sure the head of the horse is noticeable is key in this design, so I tried to show that off in each thumbnail along with the powerful neck.

There are few designs that I like at the end of this exercise. One in particular is number 05. This design has a fish feel and the lizard tail helps to sell the streamlined look. It is just creepy to see. Thumbnail 04 is intriguing to me because of the long, pointed legs. We expect to see hooves but, not in this case. Thumbnail 09 is definitely a water horse! I made sure that the fins were prominent along with the horse head and soaked fur on the neck.

01



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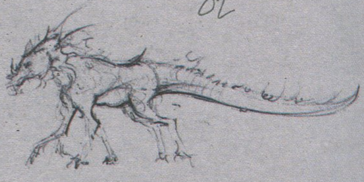
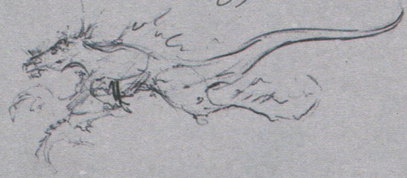


03



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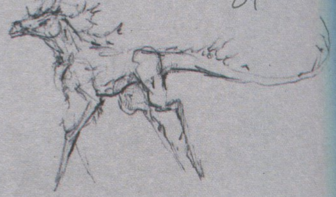
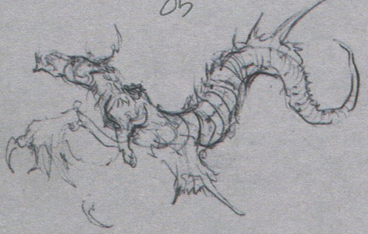


05



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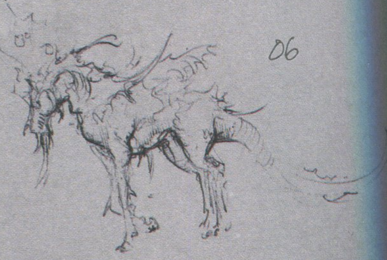
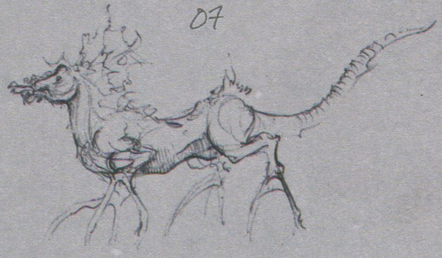


07



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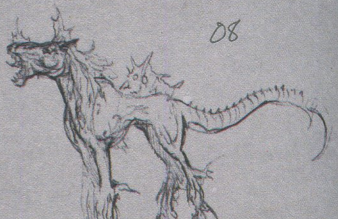
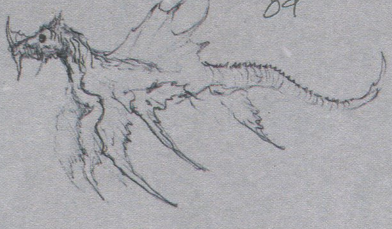
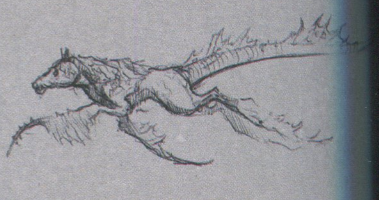


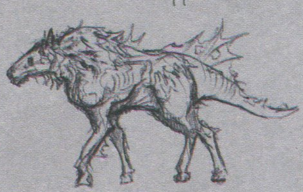
09



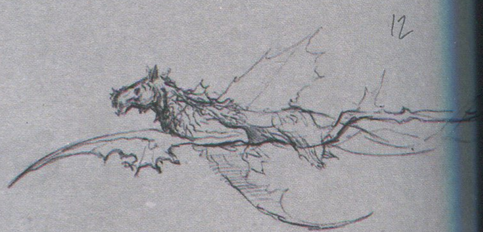
10



11



12

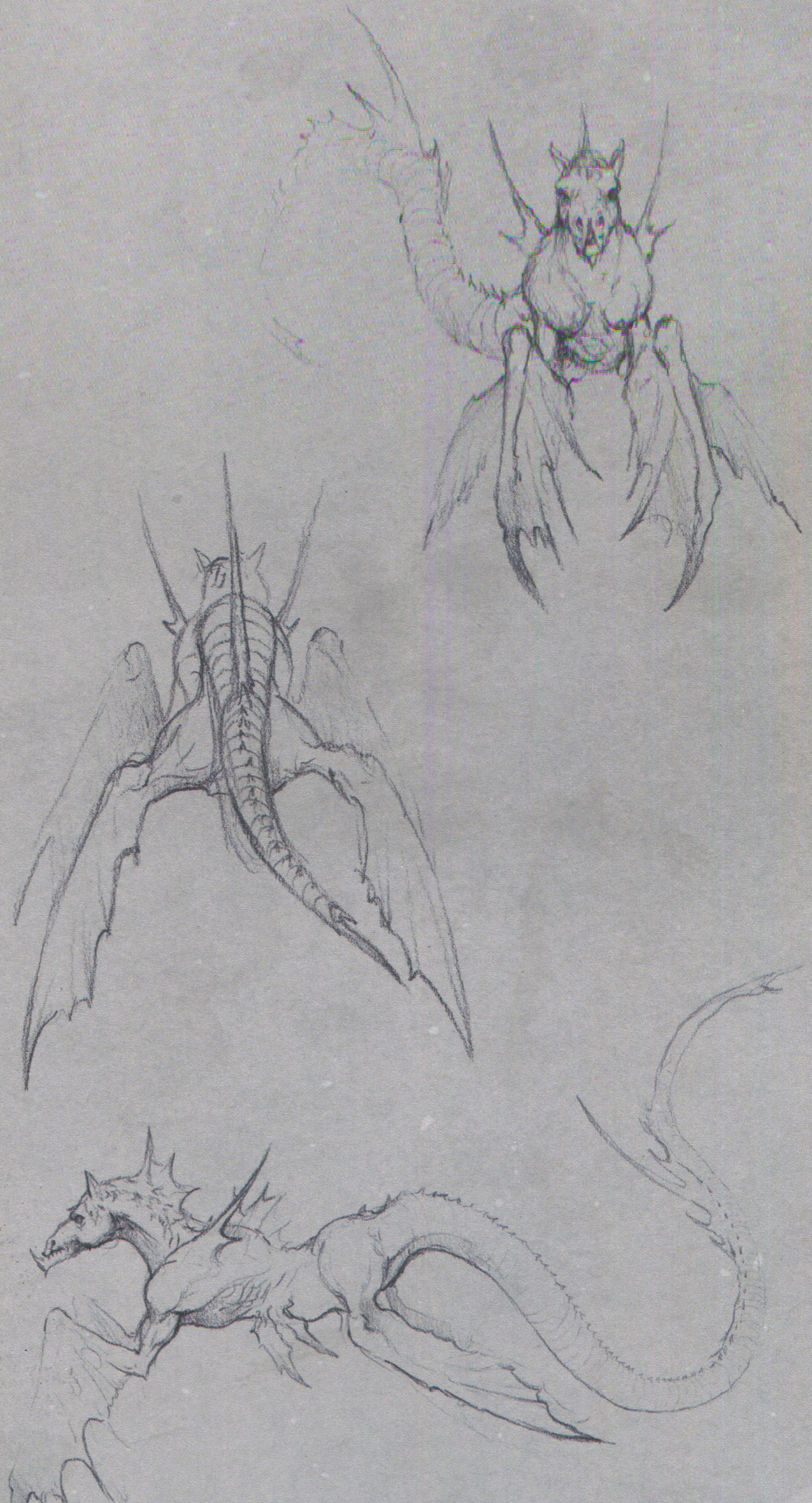


Further exploration

Out of the three favored thumbnails, I chose 09 because it represents the kelpie in an aquatic form, as well as an animal that could possibly move on land. To me, that is the most interesting combination, and the scariest. The front view shows what the kelpie would look like swimming straight towards us. I am still not happy with the way the back and neck currently connect to the head. I need to make it slightly more hunchbacked so we can see these areas from the front.

The dominant feature in the rear view is the lizard tail. From this perspective you can see the fins protruding from the shoulders as well as the tail. Since this creature is rather slender, I made this view snake-like. It is always challenging to sketch a rear view with this body type because of how thin it is. From a side view, you can see all of the major body features and muscles; but from behind, the tail and rear leg fins have to be believable. I need to keep looking at fish references in order to make those fins authentic regardless of the view.

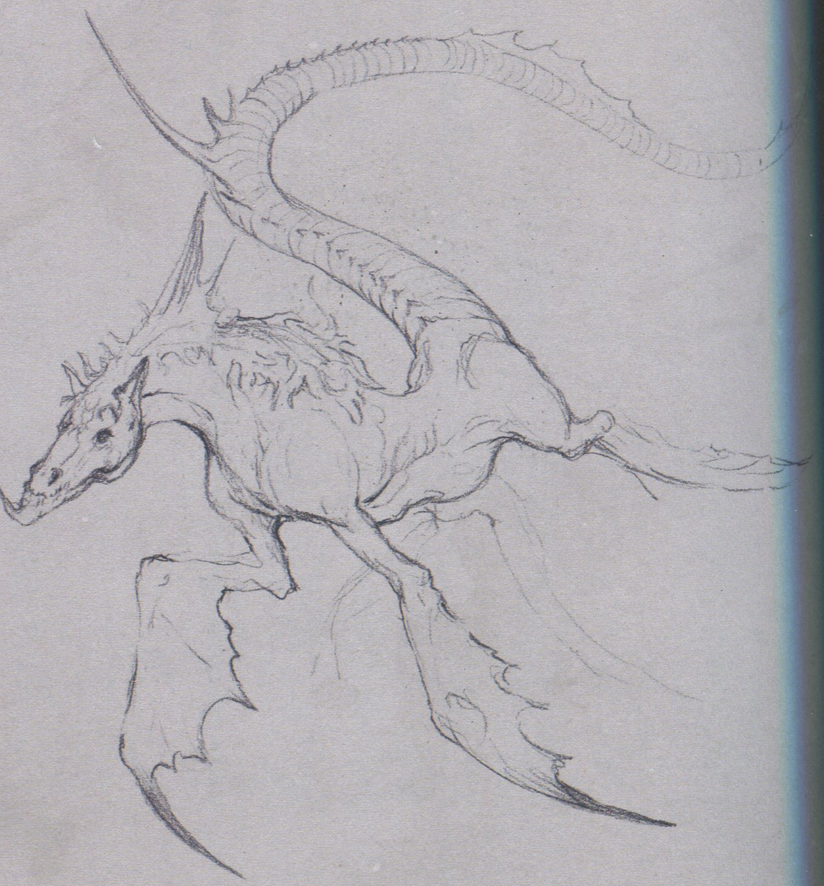
The side view, for the most part, makes me happy. However, I will reiterate that the back needs to be a little more bulky. Bulkier backs tend to create a more menacing appearance. I consider and reconsider the hind legs, especially the thigh connecting to the fins. I might add an extra joint in there so that it gives the illusion that the beast can walk on land if needed (or crawl).

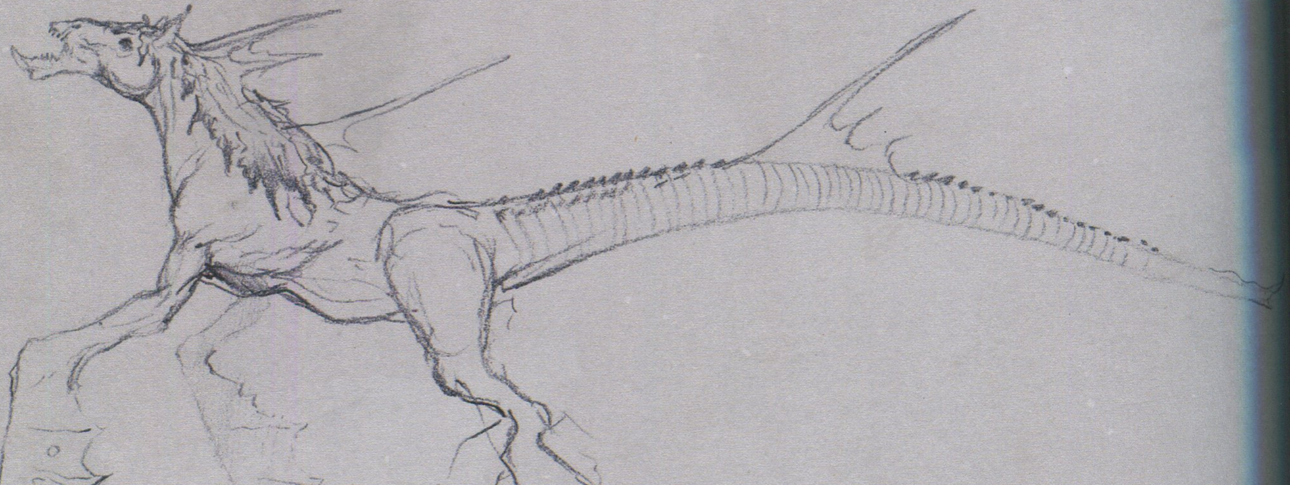


Poses

The first pose here shows the kelpie swimming. This is my initial idea for a final design because it allows the viewer to see how the creature moves underwater. The kelpie is turned in such a way that there is a pleasing, flowing arch to its body, much like an eel. This creature might be built like a bulky horse but that does not mean that it can't move gracefully underwater. The one problem with this pose is that I can't show the wet-looking fur above the water, which was a feature I wanted to demonstrate.

In the second pose, I can really show how this creature might walk on land while using its fins. This creates a unique challenge because the joints in the legs have to be able to serve two functions. Most sea creatures don't have a lot of joints to walk on land. Sea crabs, turtles, and just a few others have joints necessary to aid in walking as well as swimming.

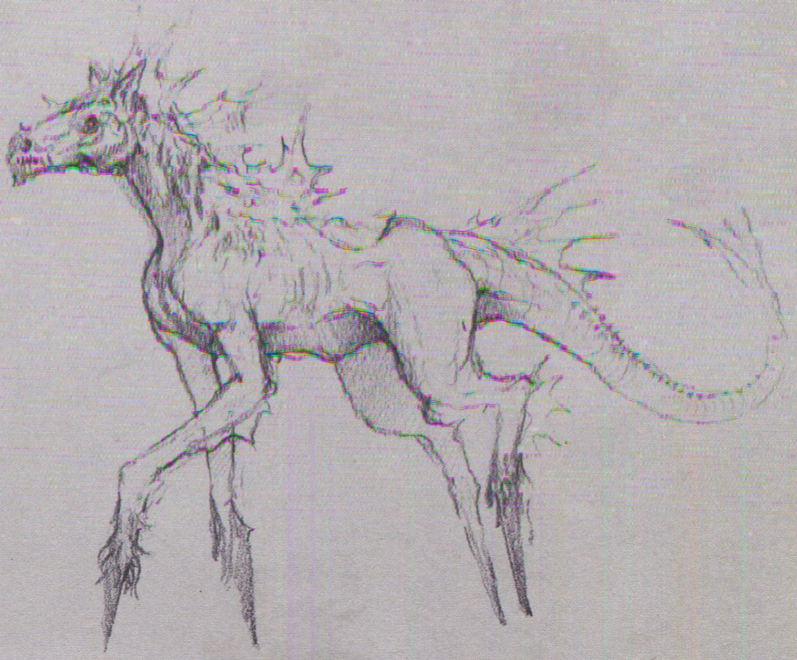




• SUBSPECIES •

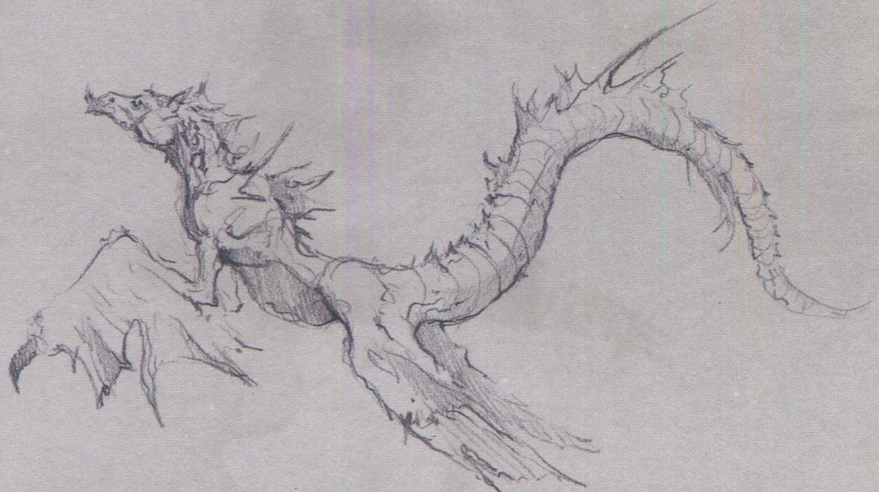
Ghost kelpie

The ghost kelpie is easily identified by its skeletal body and sharp, elongated arms that allow it to travel quickly through shallow water and mud. Its body is more horse-like than its relatives, yet the feathery fins still give it a distinctive aquatic look. It is well equipped for moving on land and is known to reach speeds of up to 20 km an hour over short distances. Its strong tail has small spikes along the top, which can be used as a weapon when needed.



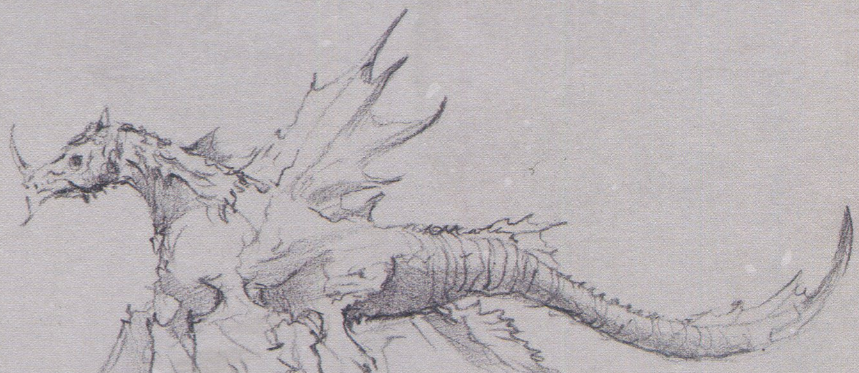
Dragon kelpie

The dragon kelpie is both an effective swimmer and can crawl on land. To me, this is extremely frightening considering the creature is known to drag its victims to the water, especially given the human-like front arms which reflect its shapeshifting abilities. While the thin body has a serpentine appearance, the head is still distinctly related to a horse. The kelpie's fins are almost like wings, hence this subspecies' name.



Sailfish kelpie

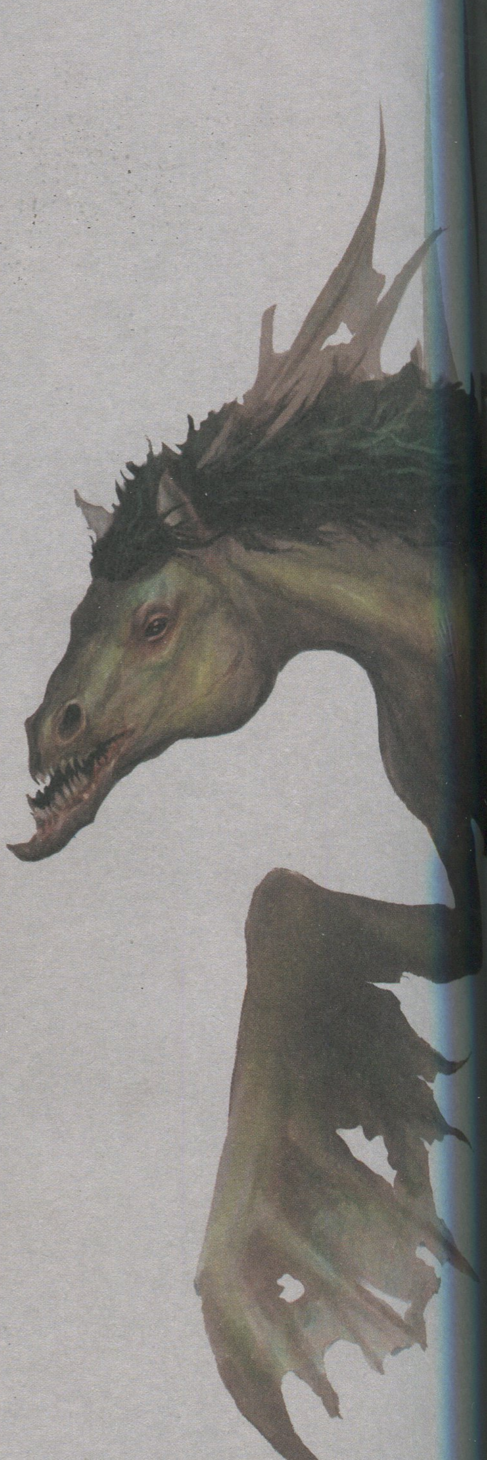
This is the most fish-like of the kelpie species. The prominent fin on the back is believed to be descended from that of a sailfish. The multiple pectoral fins are similarly constructed and are large and strong; they give the kelpie a crab-like look, suggesting how it might move on land. Their blade-like appearance reveals the menacing side of this creature.

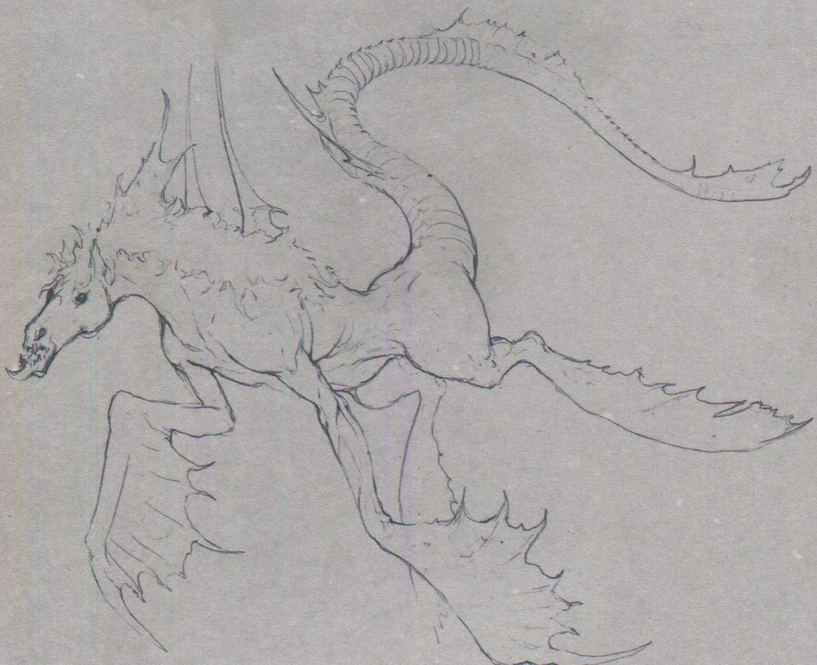


• FINAL DESIGN •

For the final design I decided to work with the swimming version of the creature. Since the kelpie has often been portrayed as a malevolent water horse, I know that designing this creature as a swimming nightmare with human characteristics is the best option. As the term demon has been closely associated with the kelpie, I made sure I included demon-like qualities, such as a spiked chin and tapered snout with sharp teeth. I also added very sharp points to the front fins. The holes and tears in the fins give it an ancient feel.

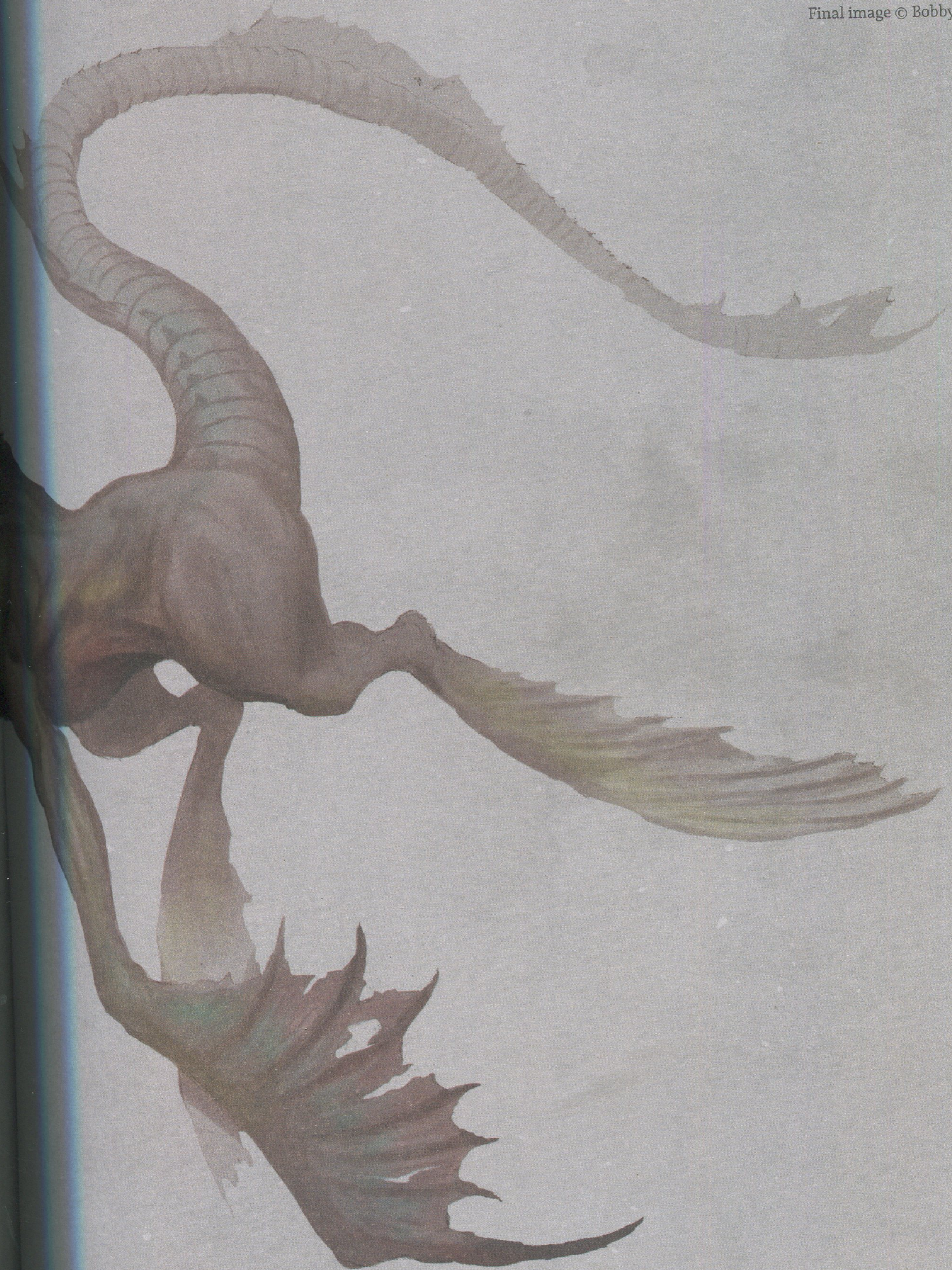
I considered the colors carefully here. Designing a creature that is malevolent, mysterious, and just all-around dangerous, I knew I shouldn't use vibrant, cheerful colors. There is nothing happy about the kelpie. I made sure I included colors that represent fish in general yet still invoke mystery. The green is important as it is associated with nature and the feeling of safety; the kelpie tricks its victims into feeling safe around it.



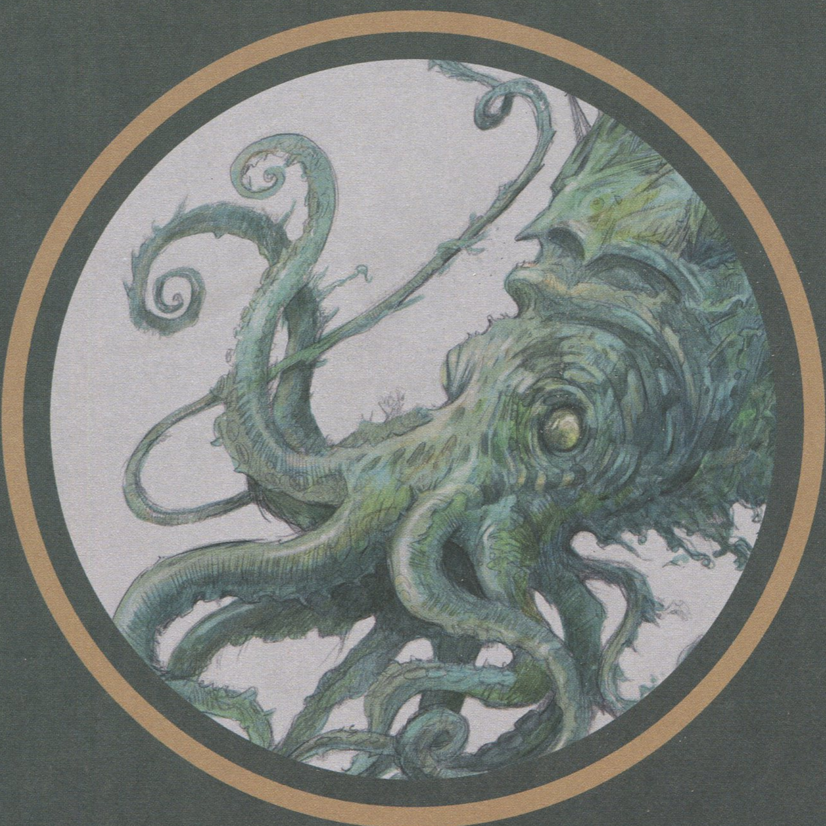


Key facts

Name: Kelpie
Taxonomy: Horse, fish, demon
Region: Scotland
Habitat: Lochs, pools
Mythical abilities: Shapeshifter
Threat to humans: 4



Final image © Bobby Rebholz



KRAKEN

The kraken is a mighty mythological sea creature that dwells thousands of meters deep in the ocean. Centuries ago it was one of the most terrifying creatures in the sea and a recurring character in tales of sailors. Believed to live around the coasts of Greenland and Norway, fisherman folklore describes it as a colossal beast with multiple tentacles, reminiscent of a giant squid. Indeed, what is often noted about the kraken is its huge size, allowing it to wrap its powerful arms around a ship and pull it beneath the waves. It is also said to have a notable impact on the water in the immediate vicinity, affecting currents and even creating whirlpools. The kraken is seen as a hostile and aggressive creature and is therefore greatly feared.

SABIN BOYKINOV

Concept artist · sabinart.blogspot.com

• FIELD NOTES •

Octopuses

Taking inspiration from real-world animals is key, which is why I examine octopuses and squids in my research stage. I make detailed sketches of an octopus's head and unusual skin. The skin appears moist and rubbery, and can contain interesting textures and ridges, which almost look like armored spikes in places. It can also have a mottled appearance. The eye is particularly disturbing, and at the kraken's huge size I imagine this to be peering through a porthole of an unsuspecting ship before it decides to take it as prey.

Tentacles and mouths

Next I continue my exploration of different tentacles and the mouth of a giant squid. This is how this animal kills its prey, so I imagine that the kraken can destroy a ship with a similar mouth. I try to understand the mechanics of the tentacles and how octopuses use them during combats, and animal attacks. I also sketch suckers and the way they would help bring the prey closer to the mouth.

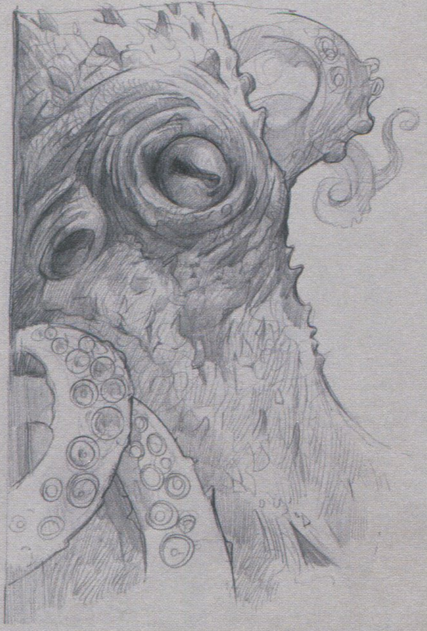
Inner mouth

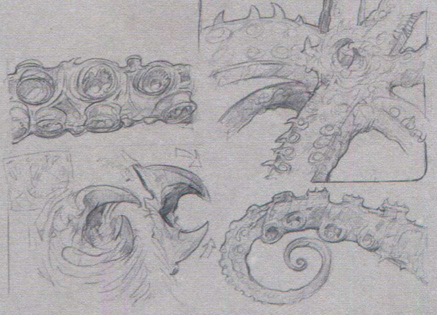
The two sketches on the right here explore the inner beak-like mouth of an ocean squid, and an animal living in the rivers of Amazonas that is similar to a bloodsucking leech. The kraken mouth would combine a mixture of these two animals, which would take the design a step away from a regular giant squid.

Squid tentacles and mantle

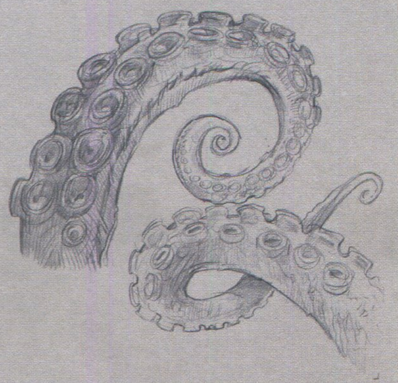
The final two sketches show part of a squid tentacle and a squid mantle and fins. I want to be accurate in representing how these work in real animals and reflect this in the kraken design. Nature is the best designer so I love to explore the variety of existing shapes and forms found in the ocean. I try to consider how the beast will swim better and what kind of hunting tactics will be best for it.

OCTOPUS

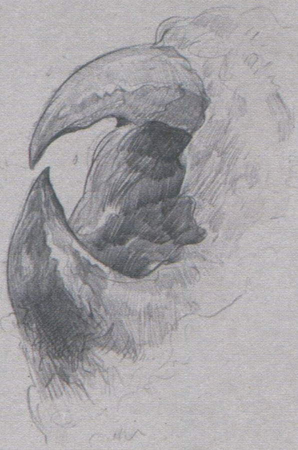




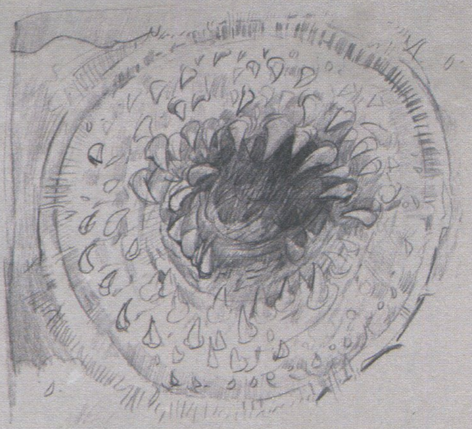
TENTACLES AND MOUTHS

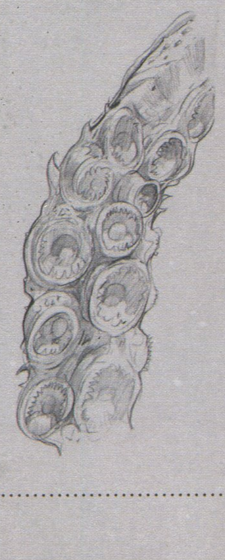


SQUID INNER MOUTH

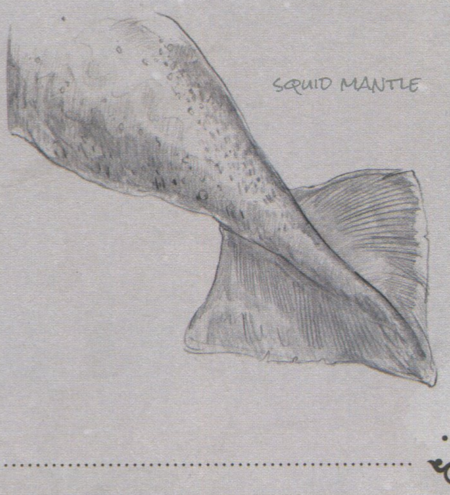


BLOODSUCKER MOUTH





SQUID TENTACLE



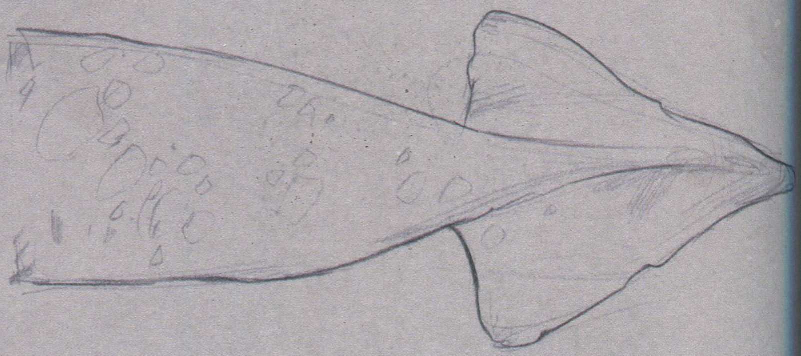
SQUID MANTLE

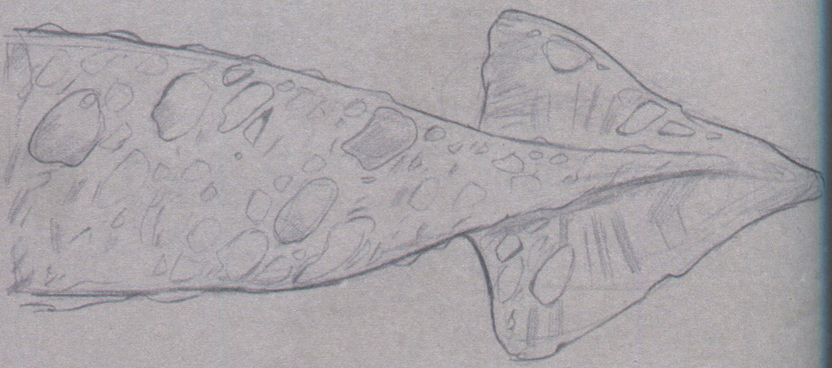
Squid skin

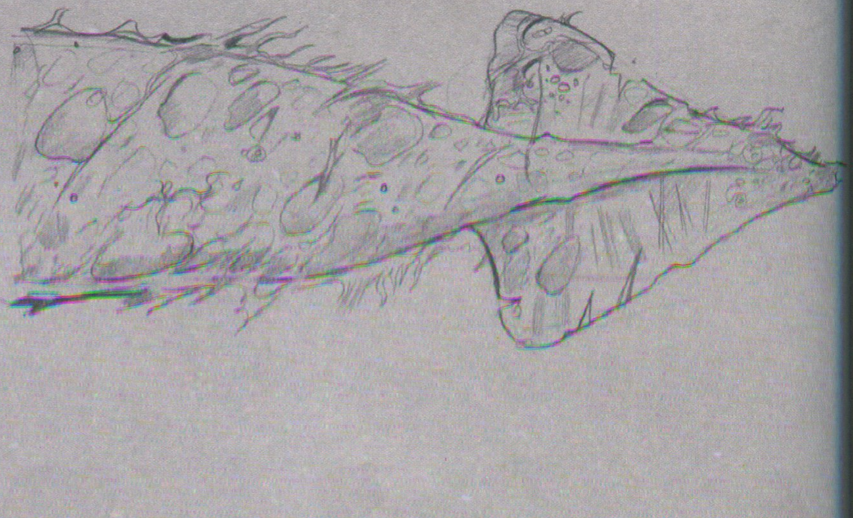
One of the most important parts of the kraken design is the mantle and fin area and the nature of its skin. I depict the first stage of the shape and overall form of this area of the body. It is important to think about the balance between tail and head – this will give the creature a more believable design. I try to imagine how it would look and behave after living for many centuries at the bottom of the ocean. I start with a heavy bold line then try to create a balance between thick and thin lines. Variation of line weight adds interest, and offers a good foundation for a successful final design.

I then start to add detail to the skin. After making observations of real-world squid skin, I begin with larger forms before refining smaller parts of the skin's pattern and texture. I try to create balance for the pattern over the body. I want the viewer to see how the skin has aged and how violent clashes with ships have imprinted on it. I continue to add more details over the main shape, trying to convey the age of the creature. This is an ancient beast that has lurked in the depths of the ocean for eons.

I then continue adding more detail, but also try to convey gesture and the idea of floating sea vegetation on the skin. Together with the suggestion movement, I add some small seashells – nothing specific, but more like visual forms and clues. I like to suggest to the viewer rather than provide full information, so the viewer can fill in the gaps using their imagination. I place lines in the same direction to indicate that the tail and attached vegetation are floating in the water. Adding more marks, old scars, and wounds on the skin gives the design more depth.


BASIC SHAPE


REFINING TEXTURE

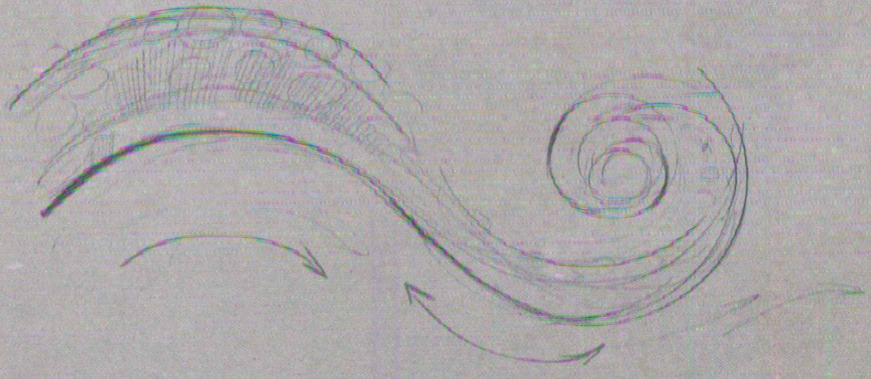

SUGGESTING MOVEMENT AND AGE

Tentacle suckers

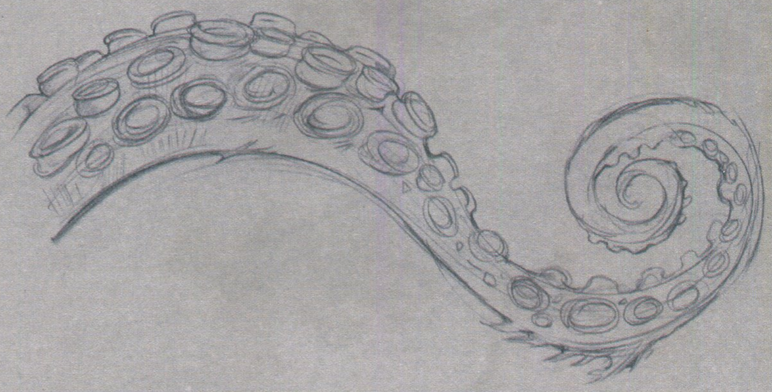
I move on to developing a tentacle with suckers – a key element allowing the creature to conquer ships and defend its territory. Based on my research into existing octopus and squid tentacles, I know that the tentacle itself is very flexible and has a multitude of suckers and small teeth to help it bring its victims closer to its mouth. I start with the overall shape and gesture. Gesture is one of the most important elements to consider when you are designing items that will be floating in water. Keeping my arm loose, I sketch a few heavy lines and then roughly place the small suckers. I like the balance of form present here; it will work well in terms of suggesting that the beast is submerged underwater.

I add more details, ensuring the suckers work three-dimensionally with the curve of the tentacle. I create a rhythm of small and large suckers to add variation and interest; I want to avoid boring, repetitive shapes. I also try to keep the structure and overall design hostile in appearance by adding areas of spikes or serrated edges. While it is important to ground creature design in reality to provide some believability, when it comes to representing a mythological monster it is vital to move away from just literal representation. The kraken needs to be terrifying and not of this world.

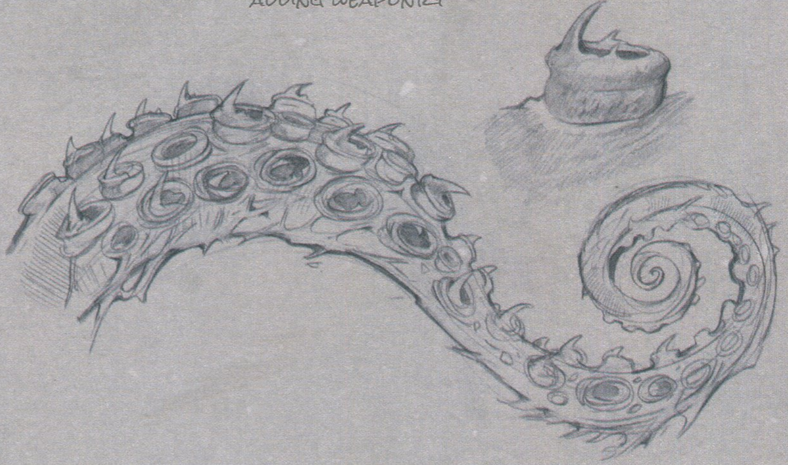
To hone the details I sketch a study of the final sucker design, which includes a kind of claw on the edge. This breaks up the lines and suggests weaponry. I take a very graphical approach, with contrasting lines and dark spots inside the big sucker shapes, and balance that with shading in some areas. The high level of contrast really helps to convey the dangerous sharpness of this creature's tentacle, while the shading builds the dimensionality.



USING GESTURE



ADDING RHYTHM AND CHARACTER



ADDING WEAPONRY

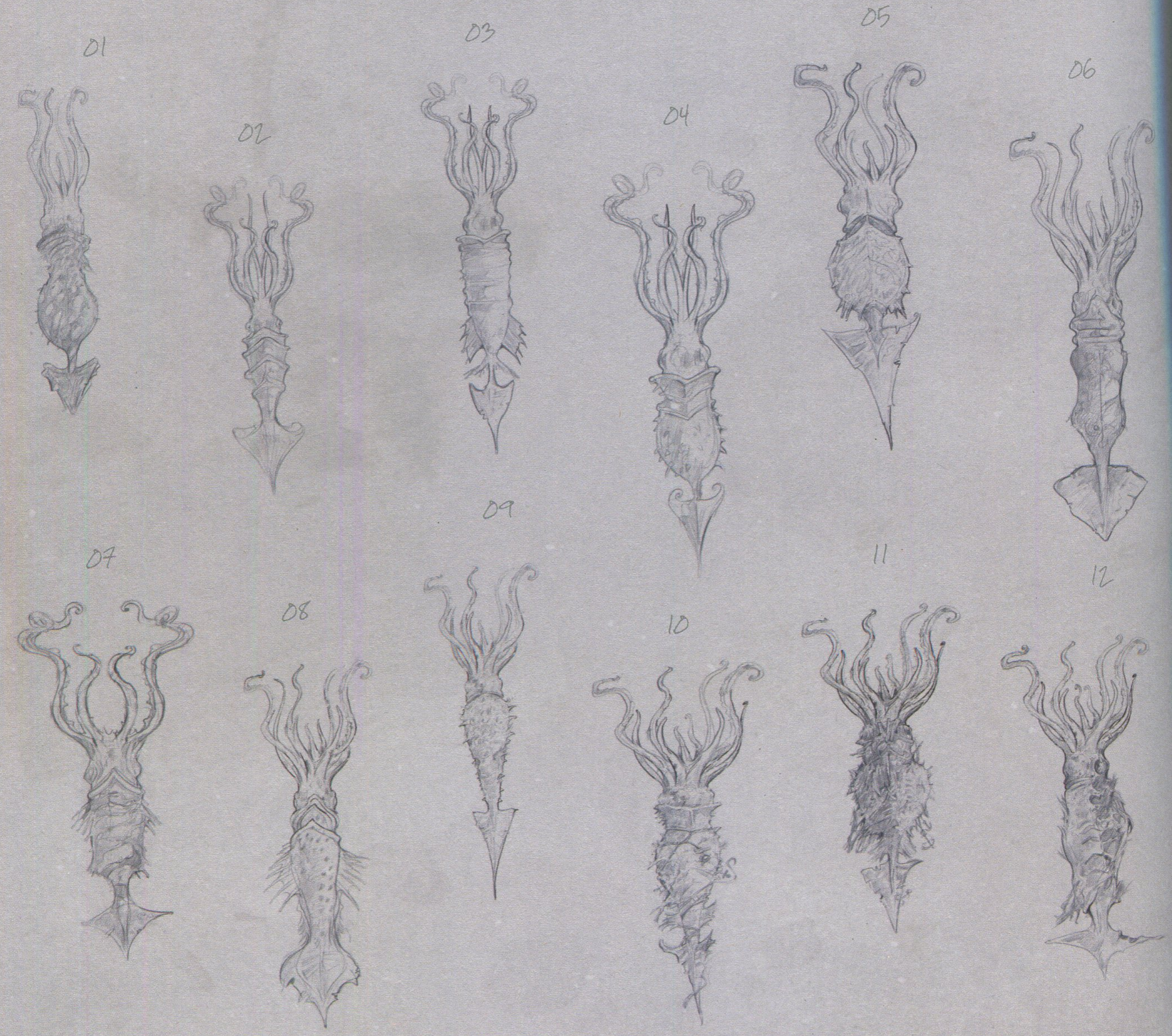
• DESIGN PROCESS •

Thumbnails

When it comes to designing a fictional creature, the thumbnails are the most important part. I avoid limiting myself and experiment with a wide range of ideas. I don't think about the details and focus on exploring shape, silhouette, and overall design – the way these work together and how to represent them accurately. While sketching the thumbnails shown below, I envisioned forms and details from nature.

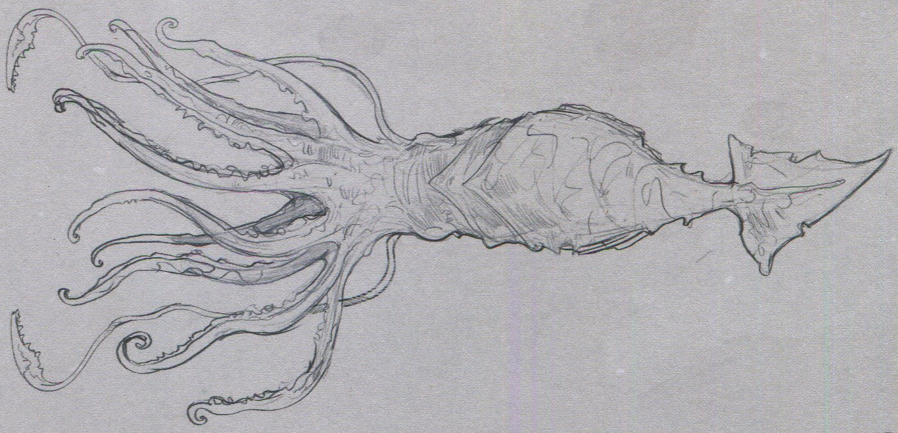
I combined many ideas together and tried to assemble them into something believable. Looking through the designs you can see how my ideas evolved from a more elegant and natural concept to something with a deadly and hostile appearance. The thumbnails 01–04 and 07–09 focus on body shape exploration. The final three thumbnails are closer to my idea for an ancient creature covered with old parts of ships and seaweed.

The fins of the squid have an almost harpoon-like appearance by the end, adding to the peril associated with the kraken. The anchors and scarred edges help create an interesting silhouette, and the more angular tentacles with less regular curves make it appear as though the beast has been ravaged by time. I think it is important to make sure that the eyes are visible in order to create a more haunting, intimidating look. The predator has its eye on its prey.

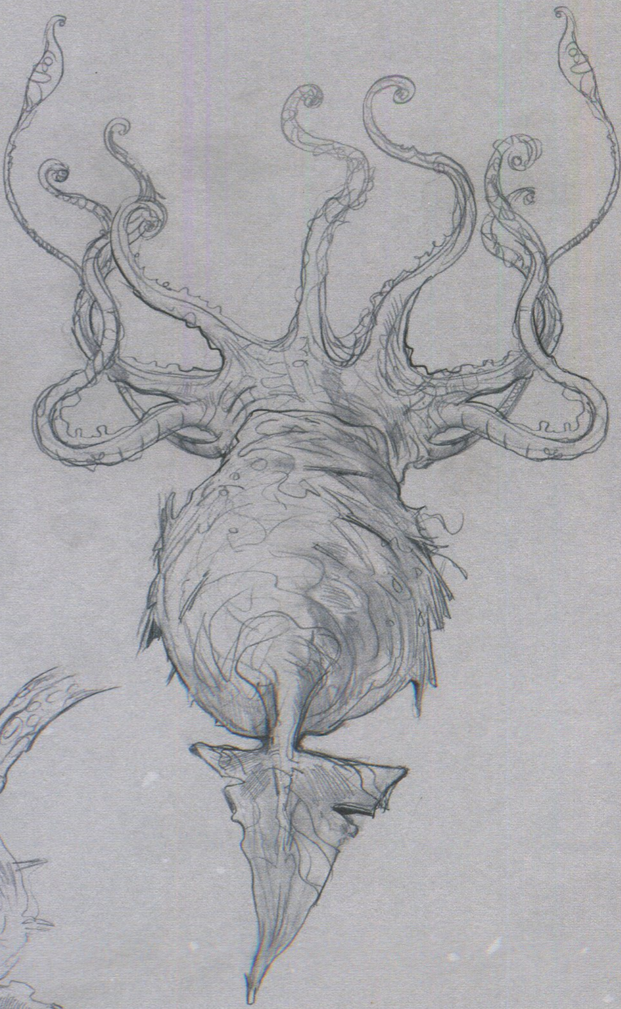


Further exploration

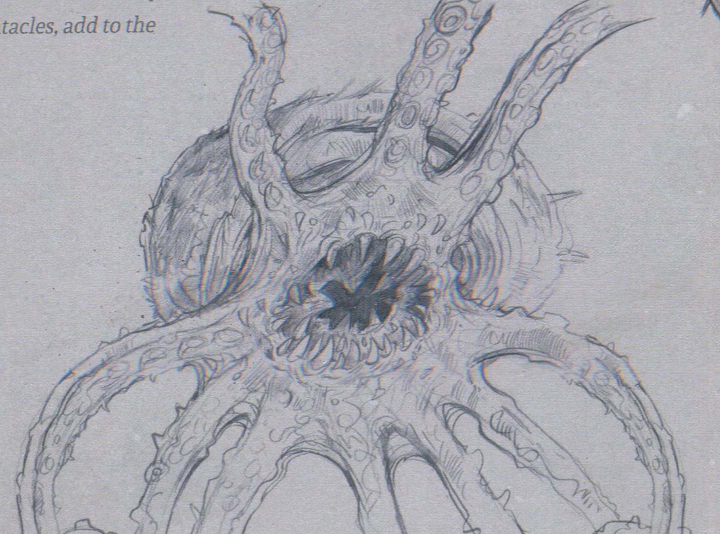
A good design will make the creature easily recognized by all, so I need to ensure the shape language is clear. Looking at the kraken from above, as shown on the right, you can appreciate the overall shape of the creature's body. My goal is to strike a visual balance between the different parts. There are two longer arms that are used to reach out to objects and pull them into its iron grip. These have tiny teeth on and are almost reminiscent of Venus flytraps, adding to the predatory feel.



From a rear angle you can observe the design of the tail-end of the mighty kraken. It needs to convey strength and I wanted the fins to look like a vicious weapon that could be used when fighting. I tried to imagine the full design of the ship destroyer and how the tentacles would be spread, ready for attack. You can start to see their full potential here, and understand how the kraken could wrap itself around a ship to drag it down into the depths.

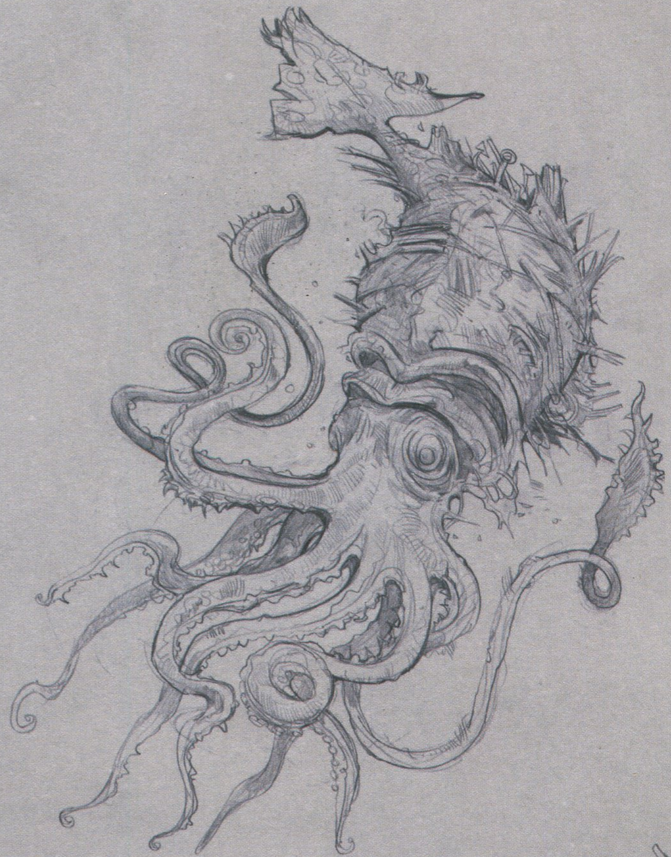


The final sketch below explores one of the most terrifying aspects of the creature – the giant mouth full of deadly teeth. I applied ideas from previous research on mouth types to give a darker personality to the kraken. I strove to achieve a frightening and powerful design, using contrast to draw the viewer in to the dark depths of the mouth. The jagged lines, not only *on the teeth but also on the tentacles, add to the sense of danger and threat.*

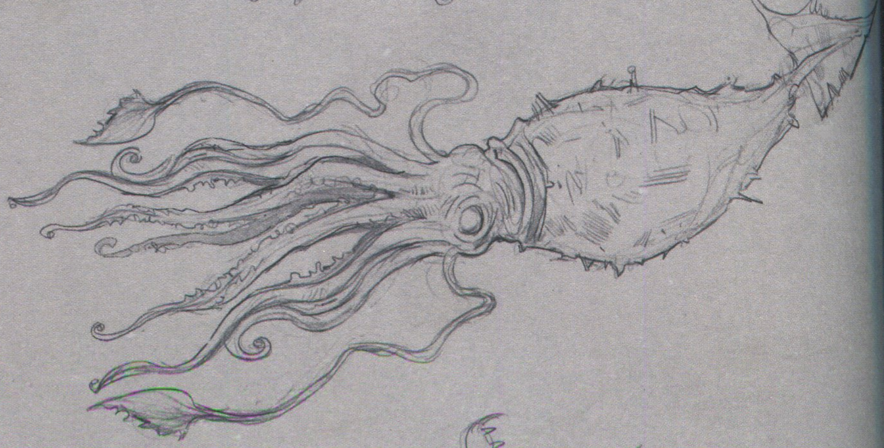


Poses

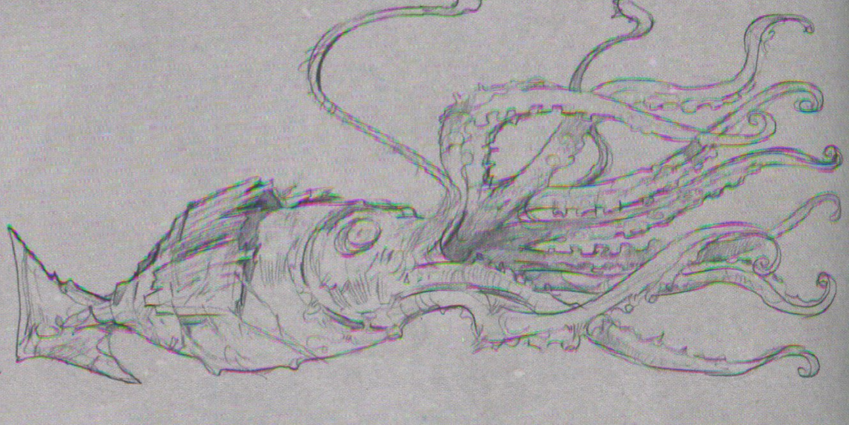
With this first pose I tried to convey a kraken full of energy and ready for new adventures. However, I think it looks far too friendly compared to the chilling stories told by sailors. The eye in particular has a more relatable, human look with the round pupil and an almost excited raised-eyebrow expression. I experimented more with adding remnants of ships by adding pieces of wood that protrude from the creature's silhouette.



Next you can see the kraken in a calm and relaxed pose, presenting a full view of the creature and the spread of its tentacles. I wanted to focus on the body shape so I omitted the relics of devastated ships from this sketch. The edges are all very jagged to ensure the kraken's age and ferocity is conveyed. I decided to leave the eye as a glassy, pupil-less orb to create an unearthly, ghostly look.



Finally, by sketching the beast from below, I tried to give it a more cinematic feel and imagined how the silhouette would appear from a different angle. This is a good way to present it as a powerful master of the ocean. It is also a simple way to demonstrate that the kraken is floating. The pose shows the kraken preparing its tentacles for attack, possibly while moving at speed. I added an extra element to the design here: a battered ship hull around the creature's body, which suggests that at some point the brute has tackled a ship with such great strength and speed that it has rammed straight through it. A horrifying thought!



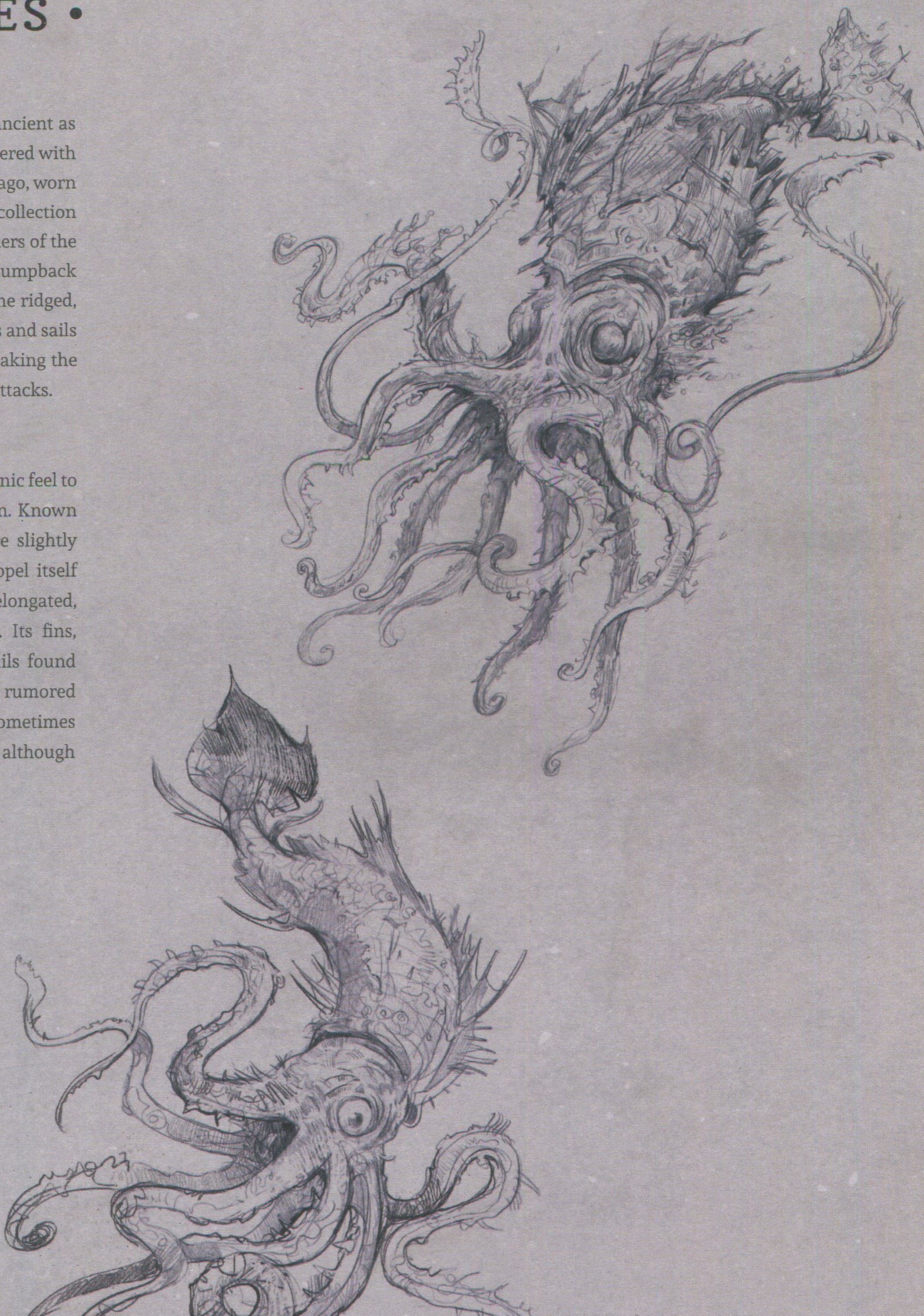
• SUBSPECIES •

Humpback kraken

The humpback kraken is equally as ancient as its common cousin, usually found covered with the remnants of ships sunk centuries ago, worn like trophies. It is believed to keep a collection of destroyed ships in the darkest corners of the ocean. Its name is derived from the humpback whale due to its whale-like tail and the ridged, humped spine formed from the masts and sails of old ships. These are often seen breaking the surface moments before the kraken attacks.

Sail-finned kraken

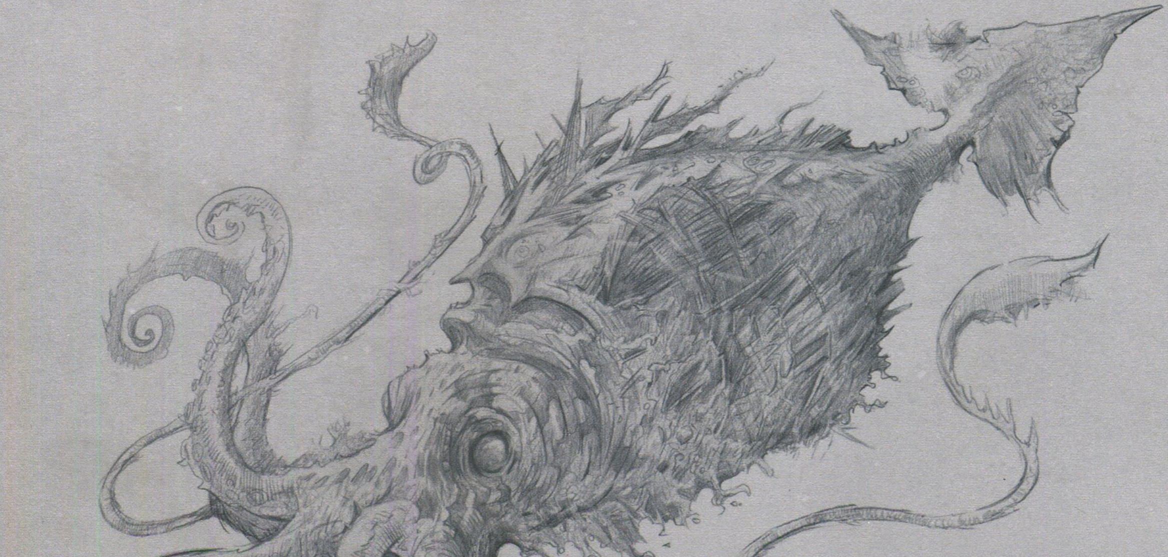
This kraken has a more classical, organic feel to it compared to the humpback kraken. Known for its high speeds, the tentacles are slightly longer, allowing it to powerfully propel itself through the water. Its body is also elongated, giving it a streamlined appearance. Its fins, while natural, are reminiscent of sails found on boats, hence its name. It has been rumored that this kraken subspecies can sometimes jump out of the water like flying fish, although sightings have been rare.



• FINAL DESIGN •

The final kraken design is one that displays power and majesty. Covered with its personal collection of sunken ships, which it uses for camouflage, the kraken is a fierce monster to be reckoned with. I used interpretation of my favorite kraken attack legends to add detail and wreckage to the skin, which enhances the storytelling of the concept. I am a big fan of the classical engravings you would see on old sea maps, so I wanted to add a hint of this into the design as well.

The creature's orb-like eye is adapted to see in the dark depths of the ocean. The lack of pupil gives it a wild look that no human can relate to. The two longer, more delicate arms look like whips, evoking feelings of pain and fear; along with the triangular tail fin they remind me of the classical look of Neptune and his trident in terms of shape language, creating a sense of grandeur. I made sure any vegetation attached to the kraken flowed in the same direction to suggest a floating effect, indicating that the beast is moving through water at great velocity.



Key facts

Name: Kraken

Taxonomy: Giant squid, octopus

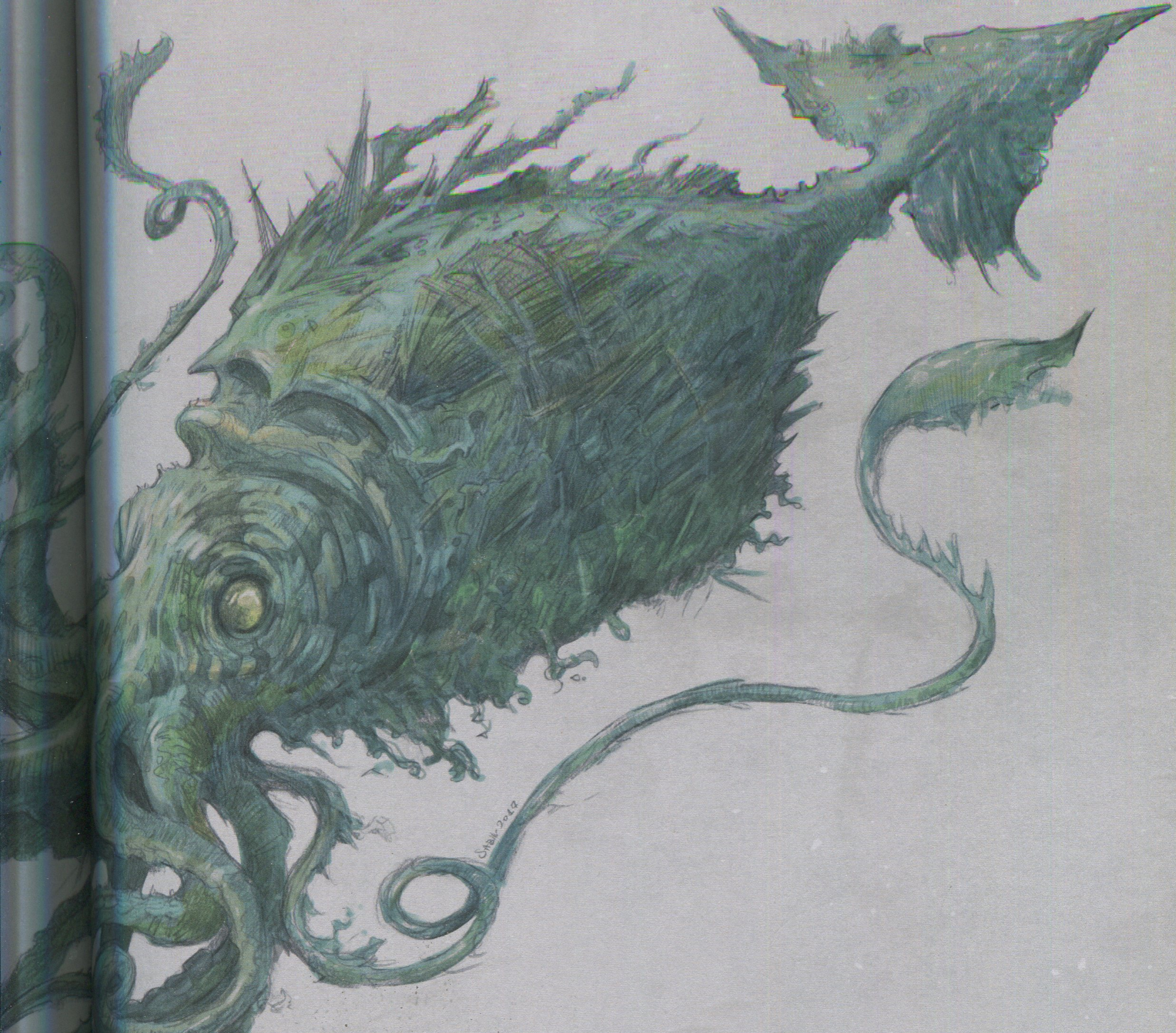
Region: Norwegian Sea

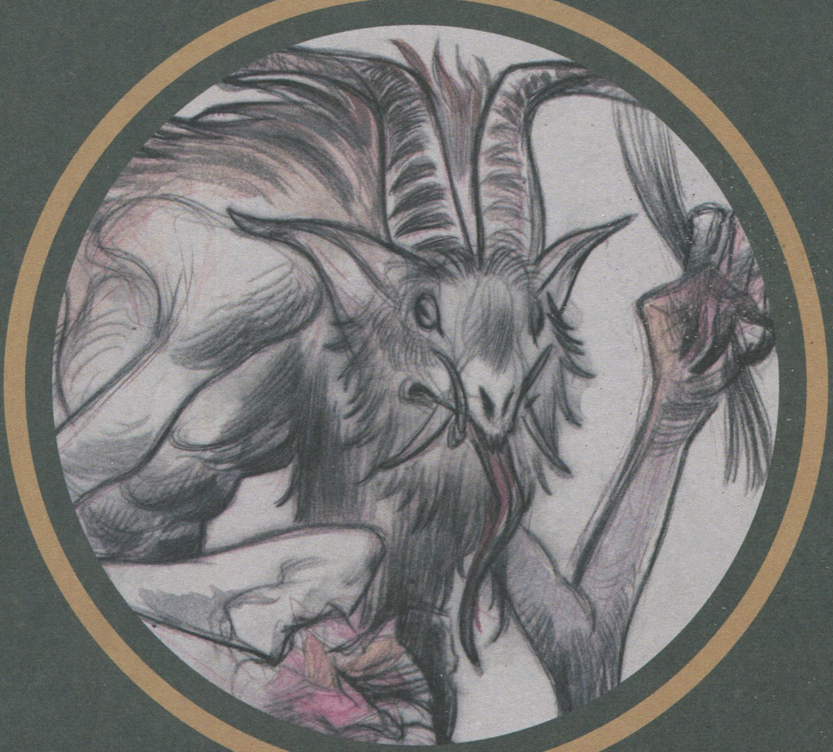
Habitat: Oceans

Mythical abilities: Colossal size

Threat to humans: 5

Final image © Sabin Boykinov





• KRAMPUS •

Krampus is a creature native to folklore from several countries in Europe, including Germany, Austria, and Slovenia, and is usually associated with Christmas. He is classically depicted as a goat demon, reminiscent of the classic perception of the devil in Christian mythology. Krampus serves as the antithesis to Saint Nicholas, and appears on Krampusnacht, the night before Saint Nicholas Day. While Saint Nicholas treats children who behave well with gifts, Krampus is sent to whip and punish those who are disobedient. The origin of Krampus is debated, as he dates back to pre-Germanic paganism. However, his depiction also mirrors that of fauns and satyrs from Greek mythology. Roots of the name come from the German word "krampen," which means claw, and he is linked to Norse mythology as the son of Hel, ruler of the underworld. However, like many pagan symbols, Krampus is now used merely to terrify young children into behaving, for fear of being dragged to Hell.

• *NATALIE HALL* •

Tattoo artist • nataliehall.tumblr.com

• FIELD NOTES •

Markhors

I need to research both the caprine (relating to goats) and demonic features of the Krampus, so I start by looking at markhors. The markhor's entire head has a very formidable appearance. It also has some of the most interesting-looking horns as far as exotic goats go. The way the horns twist is quite distinctive. Using elements of animals that offer peculiar shape language can lead to room for interesting development in regards to silhouette.

Catalina goats

The Catalina cashmere goat probably has my favourite horn design. I find it to be a decadent feature, which with some addition and abstraction will result in a grandiose head design. Cashmere breeds tend to have a fluffy coat, which would be ideal for a different version of Krampus.

Ungulate eyes

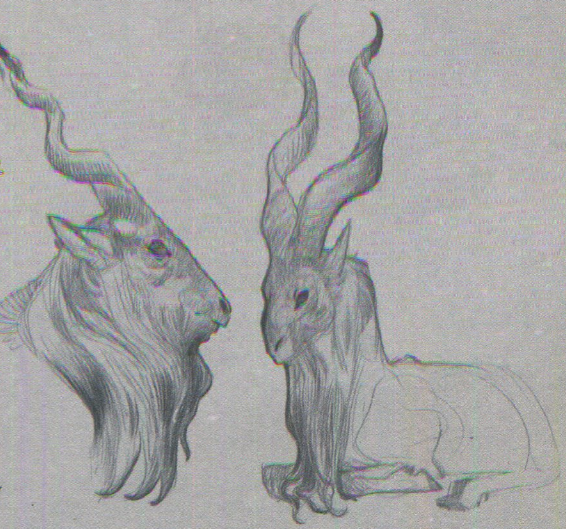
There is something beautifully unnerving about the rectangular pupil of goats and other ungulates, considering we as humans are so used to our circular ones. As people we associate the presence of eyes, nose, and mouth as comforting, sharing similarities with creatures on a base level. However a slight difference even within similar features can leave us confused and sometimes scared.

Boars

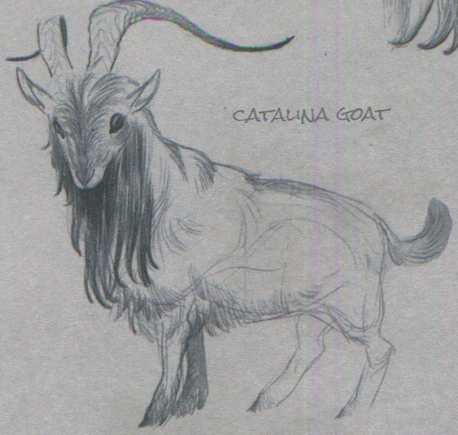
While Krampus is primarily identified as a goat–demon hybrid, in my designs I enjoy using features of other creatures not classically used. A boar's sloped head offers an interesting combination of shapes. The coarse texture of the fur is great for the festive fiend, and perfect for an unusual mohawk that could run all the way down his back. A boar's tusks present another vicious aspect that could be used for Krampus.

Oni masks

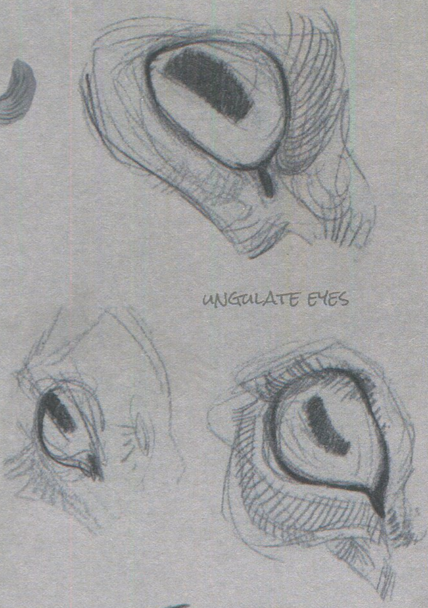
Moving on to demonic features, Japanese Oni masks, as well as masks from the European countries that Krampus folklore resonates most in, offer a great classic design influence. Oni are a type of yōkai (see page 164). Many contemporary Krampus masks seem similar Oni masks, with their teeth bared and protruding in an impractical fashion. This frightening element can be incorporated to convey the threatening, demonic nature of Krampus.



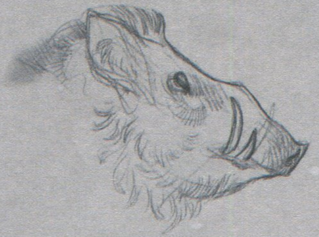
MARKHORS



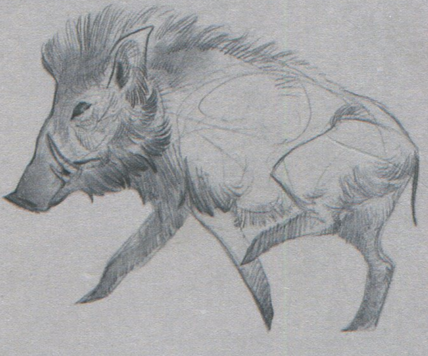
CATALINA GOAT

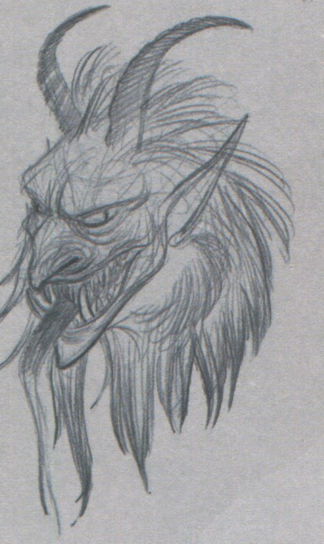


UNGULATE EYES



BOARS





ONI MASK

Goat horns

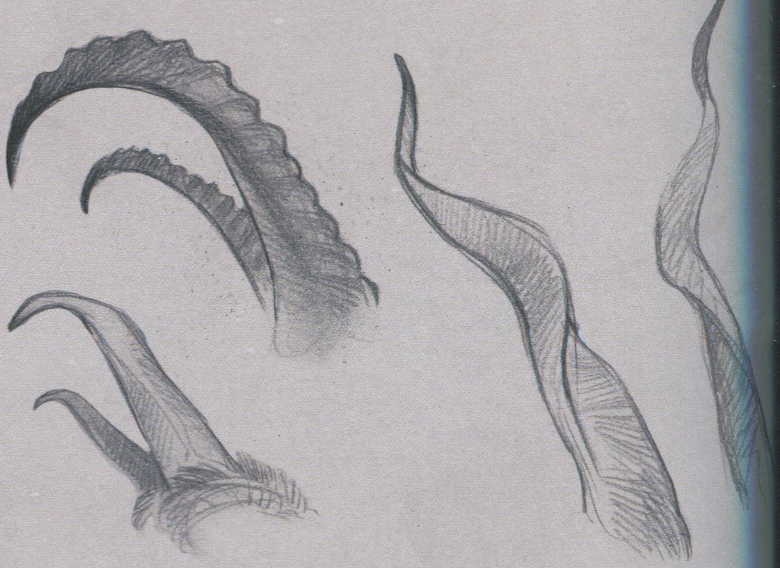
Horns are essential for the Krampus design. There are so many variations of goat horns in so many breeds across the world, the possibilities seem endless. Add on the fact that individual goats can even have interesting horn anomalies on themselves – featuring one horn in a completely different direction or a different shape from the other can give you so many options. Take note of the concave and convex portions of the horns as well as the ridges. Most horns that have multiple twists rarely have ridges as well, and vice versa.

After choosing the type of horn I want for Krampus, I start with a foundation line that extends from the base to the tip of the horn. I will then work shapes onto the top and bottom of this. Horns might be easy in terms of design, but it can become difficult when it comes to quarter views. Good reference is key, especially in terms of trying to understand horns from different angles. Keep in mind that no two horns are exactly the same!

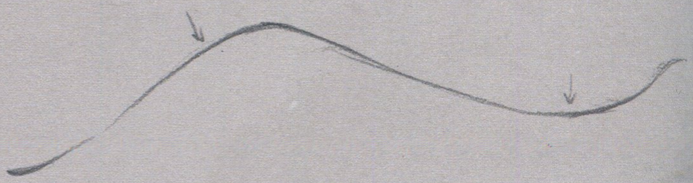
With the base line sketched, I work in some *shapes below it. I try to think of most curves* in horns the same way you would if drawing a ribbon or folded cloth. I also can't help but take some artistic license into the design and add a few curves I find appealing but that would likely not occur in nature. It is a mythical creature after all!

I then use line width to give a sense of texture to the horn, letting my lines stay vague and *allowing the viewer's mind to fill in the gaps* of what exactly is occurring at the angles and *curves of the horn shape. I hide the base of* the horn beneath some feathery fur to make it appear realistic, and not simply something that has been stuck on. Finally, I add some ridges to the top of the horn.

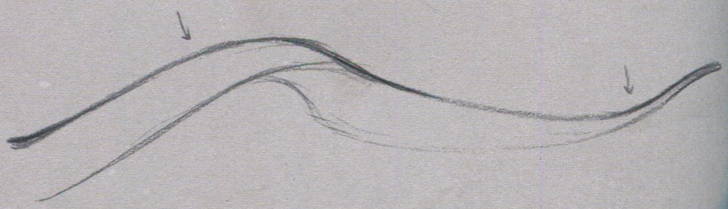
RESEARCHING TYPES OF HORNS



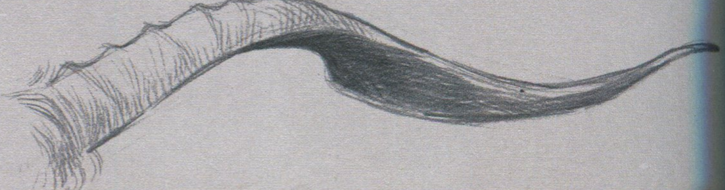
FOUNDATION LINE



BUILDING UP SHAPE



ADDING TEXTURE AND RIDGES



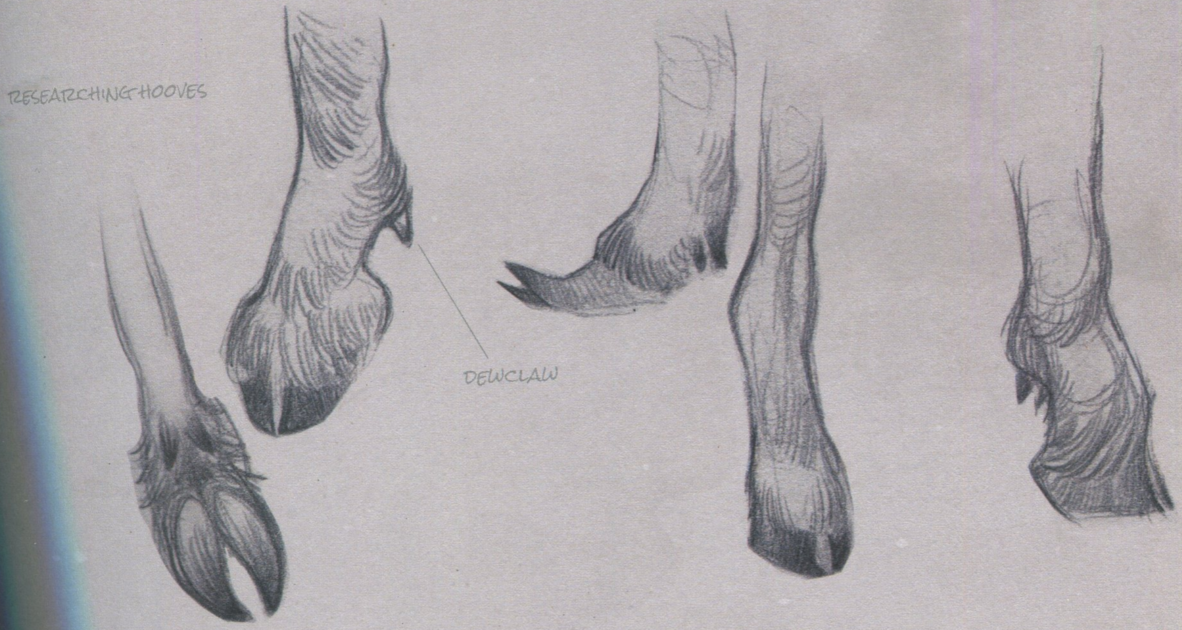
ooves

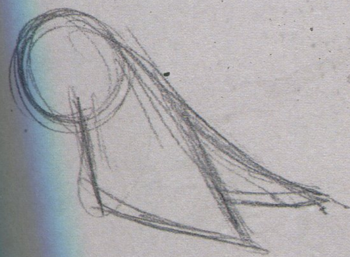
t like their horns, goats' hooves come in ny shapes and angles. While I enjoy drawing e more curvy design in terms of aesthetic, ountain goat hooves would be more fitting r Krampus. Note the inner dewclaws that nd to sit at the back if looking at a goat's ooves from behind. Goats have two toes at the ront and two dewclaws at the back.

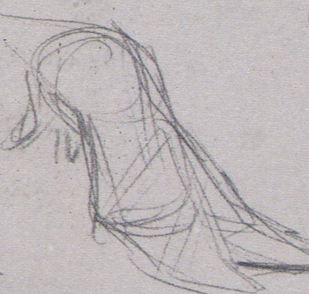
ften when I start sketching hooves or hands, nd anything in between, I draw out a general lhouette to indicate how much space I want t to occupy. In the bottom left sketch you can see I use basic shapes to use as a foundation – a circle, a diamond shape, and a triangle. Regular goat hooves are quite short so that they can climb extremely steep angles; however, I will create a cross between a goat and a horse hoof to give it a more unnatural, demonic feel.

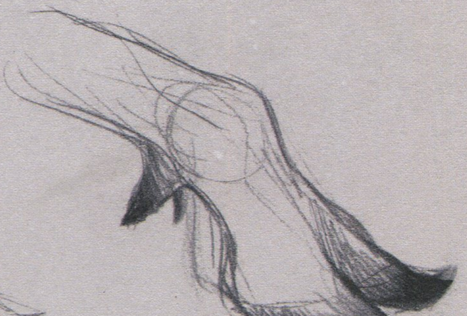
I add definition to the hoof and extend the tips even more. By most standards I imagine I draw the hooves of an animal that hasn't had theirs clipped in a while and would probably be terrible in terms of comfort! Krampus needs to look a little unkempt though, and longer claws create a more intimidating feel. It is important to never forget dewclaws!

As I add the final detail I curve the hooves a bit more than before, and generally round the design slightly. The curve makes them a bit more dramatic and striking for the purpose of a demonic design. Many designs that follow exactly what a goat hoof should look can seem quite boring and unimaginative, and so I aim to avoid that for this fantasy beast if I can.









• DESIGN PROCESS •

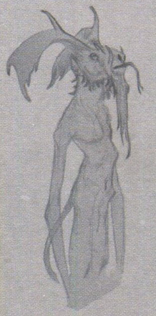
Thumbnails

Thumbnails are a rarity for me. Usually I find myself thinking about what I would prefer it to look like more than I do drawing them. There is no wrong way to go about it as long as you find a technique that works for you. I tend to start with three to four ideas and work from there, sometimes mixing and matching between the three original ideas. Any more becomes a bit distracting for me. Shape and proportions are key elements I like to distort and play with. While most Krampus designs keep classic proportions of a human–goat hybrid, I throw in an element of ape, with longer arms and a hunched posture.

Skulls and decay tend to be common features of demonic faces, and I tried to bring this element through the rest of the body by emphasizing the bony structure of some body parts and distorting some of the muscles. I have always viewed demons as creatures created from the remnants of deceased animals, including humans. When I think of their hides I think of animals with an unfortunate case of mange, with very rough skin and sparse hair scattered across their pelt.

The thumbnails with static poses are, for this mythical creature, not the best. In most traditional designs Krampus tends to be in motion, often chasing after children or capturing them. He is a beast of action and not so much seen lurking in shadows. I try to introduce my own sense of style flow into my designs and try not to worry about what people are expecting.

01



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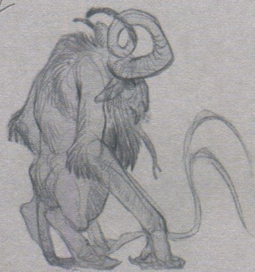

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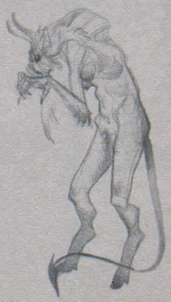

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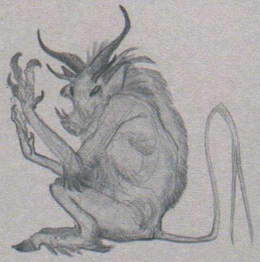

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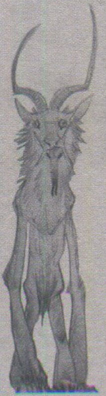

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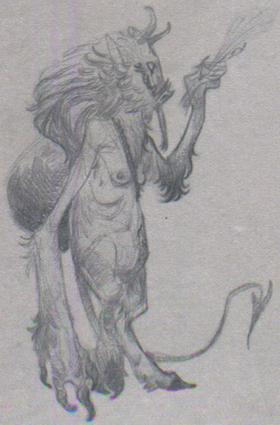

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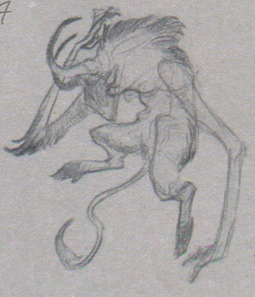

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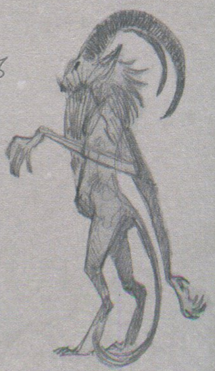

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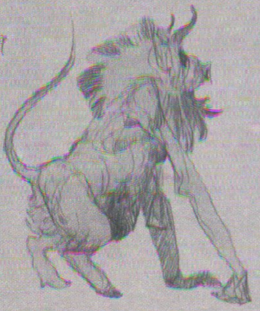

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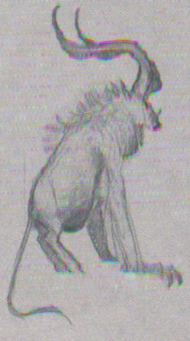

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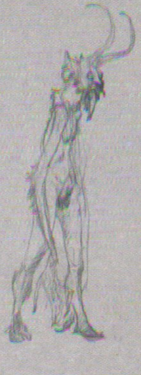

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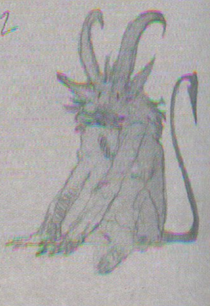
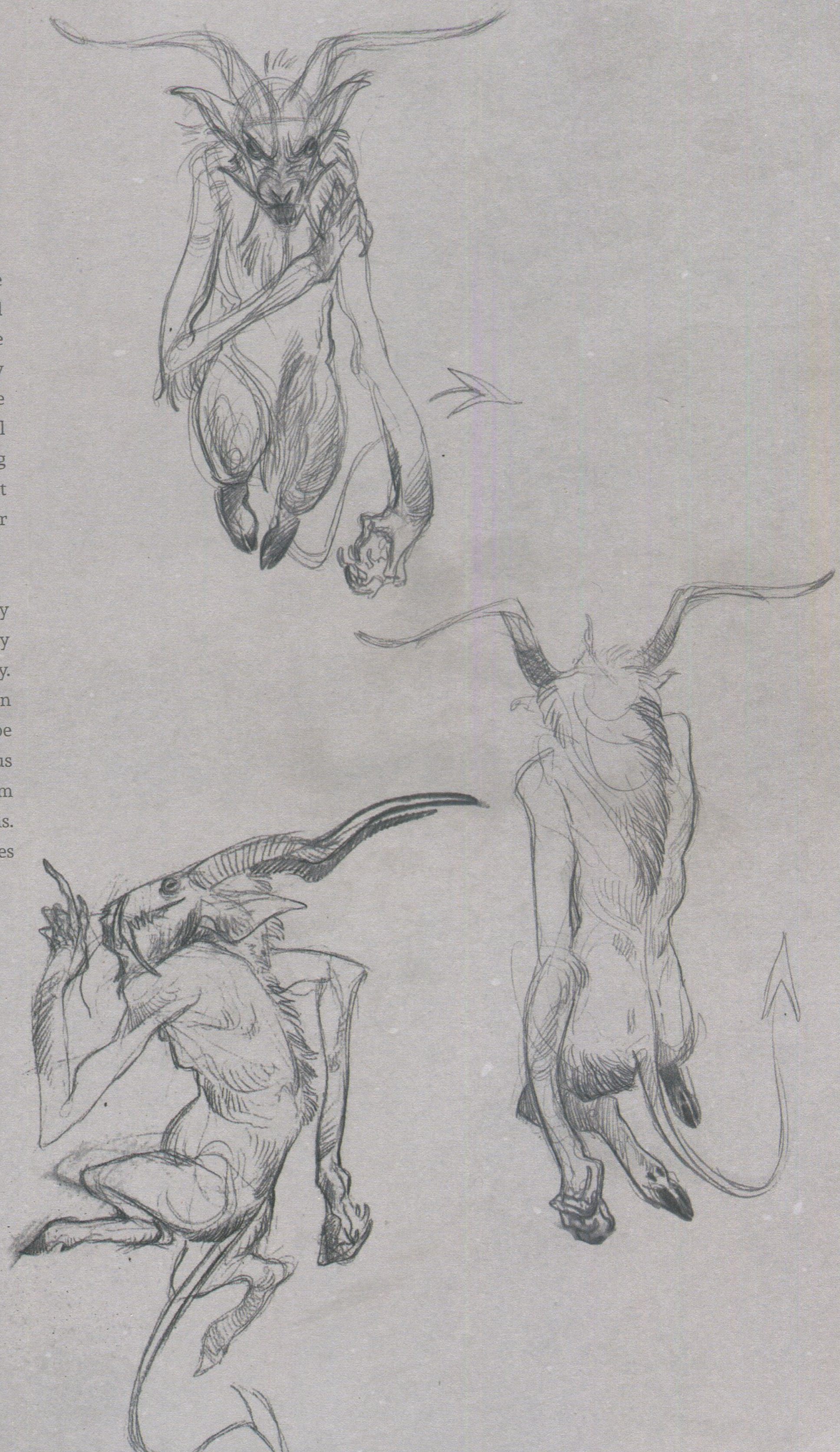


Further exploration

Looking at the Krampus straight on, the evil, caprine eyes become an area of focus. His wiry frame is evident and presents an interesting composition in this pose. His arms are a longer length than his hindquarters, enabling him to reach out after the children he is chasing.

From behind I find the creature's silhouette to be most important. The shapes should read as something formidable and disturbing. The extra weight on the upper half of the body from the wide horns and boar-like fur create an imposing silhouette, and the demonic tail is more obvious. I sometimes prefer drawing horror-related designs from behind, as what is left to fill in the blank can produce a better reaction than something viewed front on.

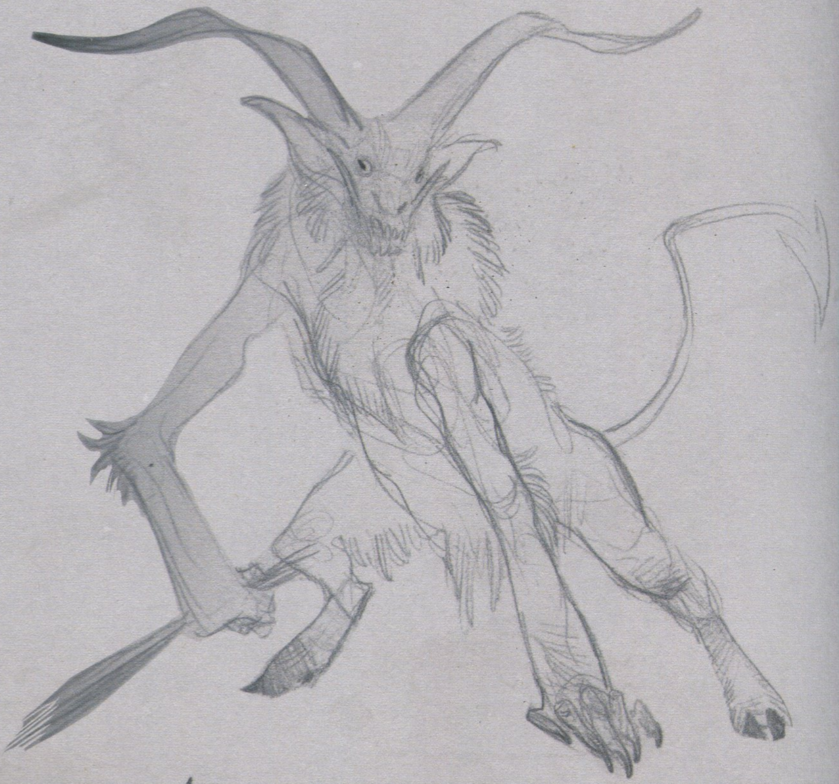
A side view allows me to infer how dense my idea of Krampus is. I have a fondness for lanky structures with an intimidating physiology. Posing a creature well can take this idea even further with little effort. Side views tend to be a default pose for me. You can see the Krampus wagging his finger in a reprimanding way from this angle, and the length of his twisted horns. His distorted muscular anatomy also becomes more apparent.

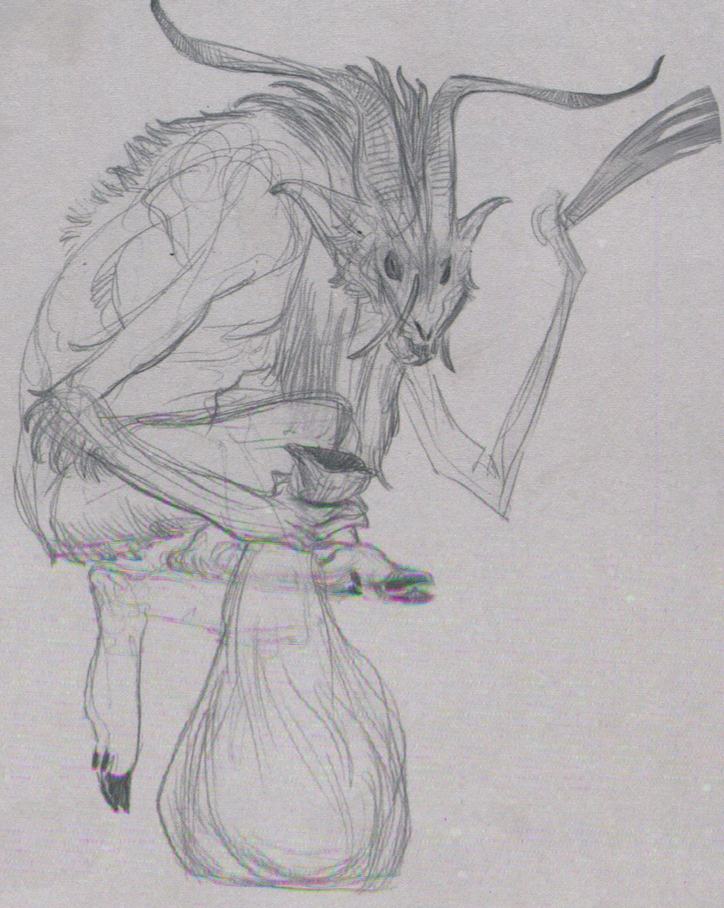


Poses

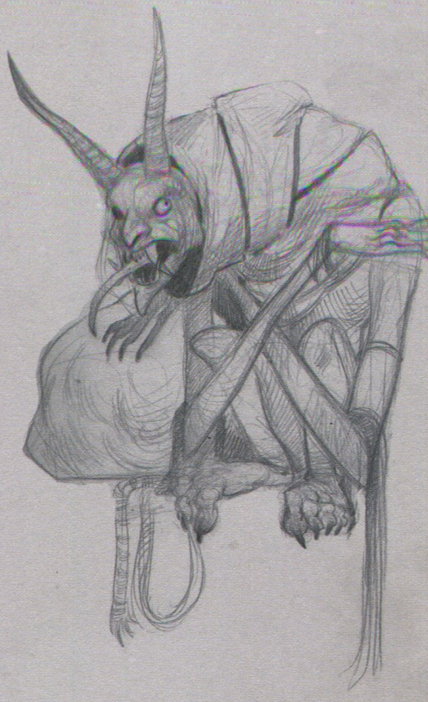
In the first pose here Krampus has an active stance, with his head raised high as if he is looking for his next victim. His limbs and tail are poised, ready for action, and his face shows a slight snarl. He is also holding a bunch of brambles used to whip the children. The fact he is almost on all fours perhaps gives him more of a beastly, predatory appearance.

The second pose is probably the more dynamic of the two. I prefer energized poses that tend to complement my line work at the same time. I decided to show Krampus carrying a bag of unfortunate children in addition to the switch, as it is an icon commonly associated with the Krampus figure. His heels are shown kicked up, as if he is mid jump, which I think to be an apt posture for Krampus.



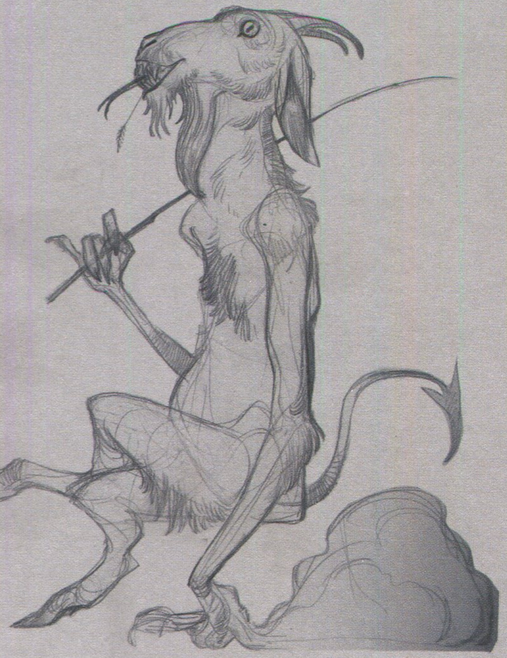


• SUBSPECIES •



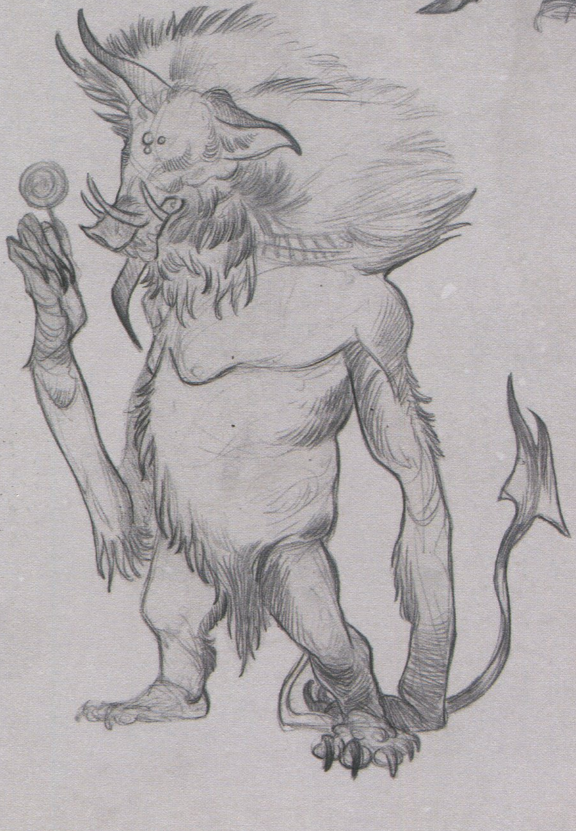
Japanese Krampus

This Krampus is a Japanese reimagining of the demon. His face is reminiscent of a kabuki- (a form of traditional Japanese theater) or Oni-style mask, similar to what you might come across if you looked through old traditional paintings of Oni, kappas (another demon-type creature found in Japanese folklore), and ghosts. Far less beast-like than other subspecies, the touches of human traits give him a more terrifying quality. Here you can see Krampus with his sack, traditionally thought to be for carrying naughty children to Hell.



American Krampus

American Krampus is much more of a goofy character compared to his brothers. Thought to be descended from a nanny goat rather than a more traditional ram, this Krampus' wall-eyed stare and blunt teeth, often seen chewing on straw, portray a very harmless look. However, armed with a fierce-looking switch for whipping, and a burlap sack for disobedient children, along with a demonic tail, he still gives a menacing impression.



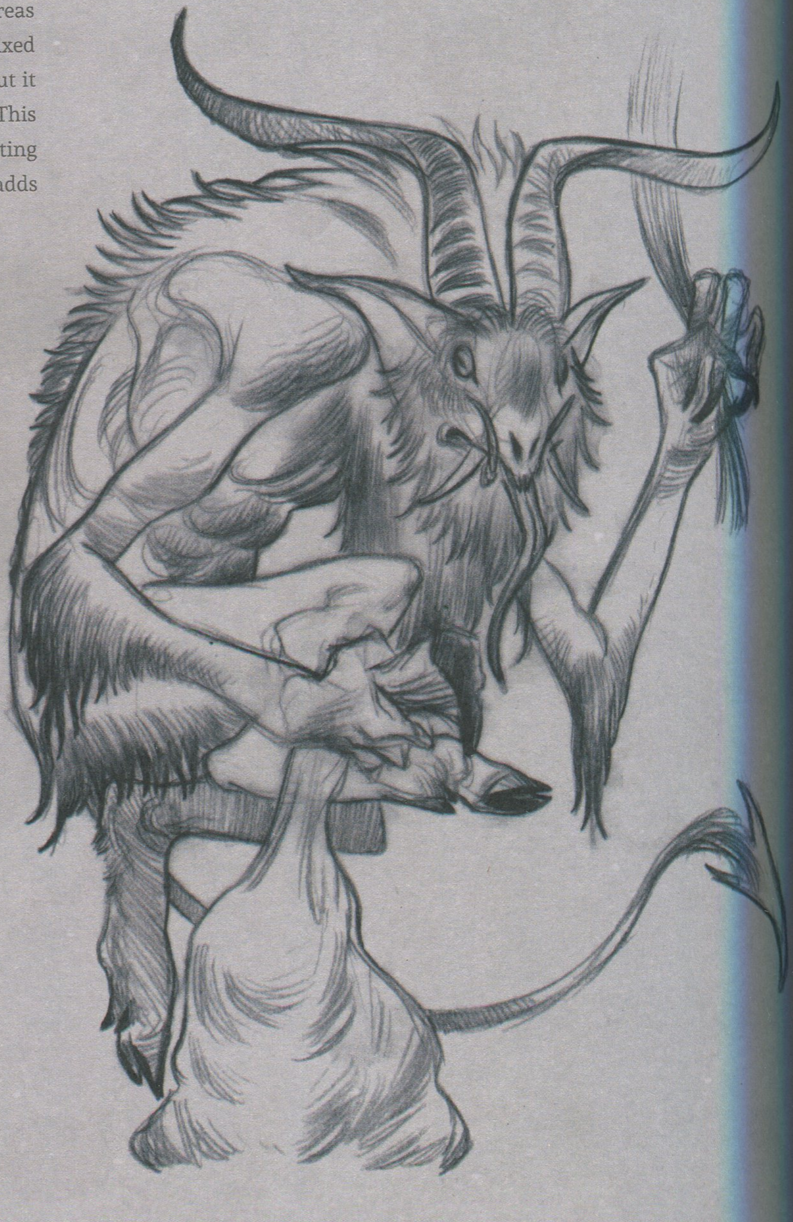
Indian Krampus

Thought to be the offspring of a Hindu demon and a wild boar, this Krampus' coarse physiognomy and goat horns still keep his heritage within the Krampus family. His boar-like nose and Rakshasa heritage mean he is well equipped for sniffing out those trying to hide from him. Often seen gallivanting after terrible children, his elongated arms are perfect for grabbing the disobedient as they try to outrun him. I felt a more angular approach to sketching helped flesh out this design.

• FINAL DESIGN •

Here is the final design for the Krampus. I made sure I focused on his caprine attributes and a mix of impish and tormented demon in his posture. In the face in particular you can see how I mixed the key characteristics from studies of both goats and Oni masks, for example taking aspects from the Oni's mouth, such as the long, demonic tongue, but using the more rounded nose, and eyes, of a goat.

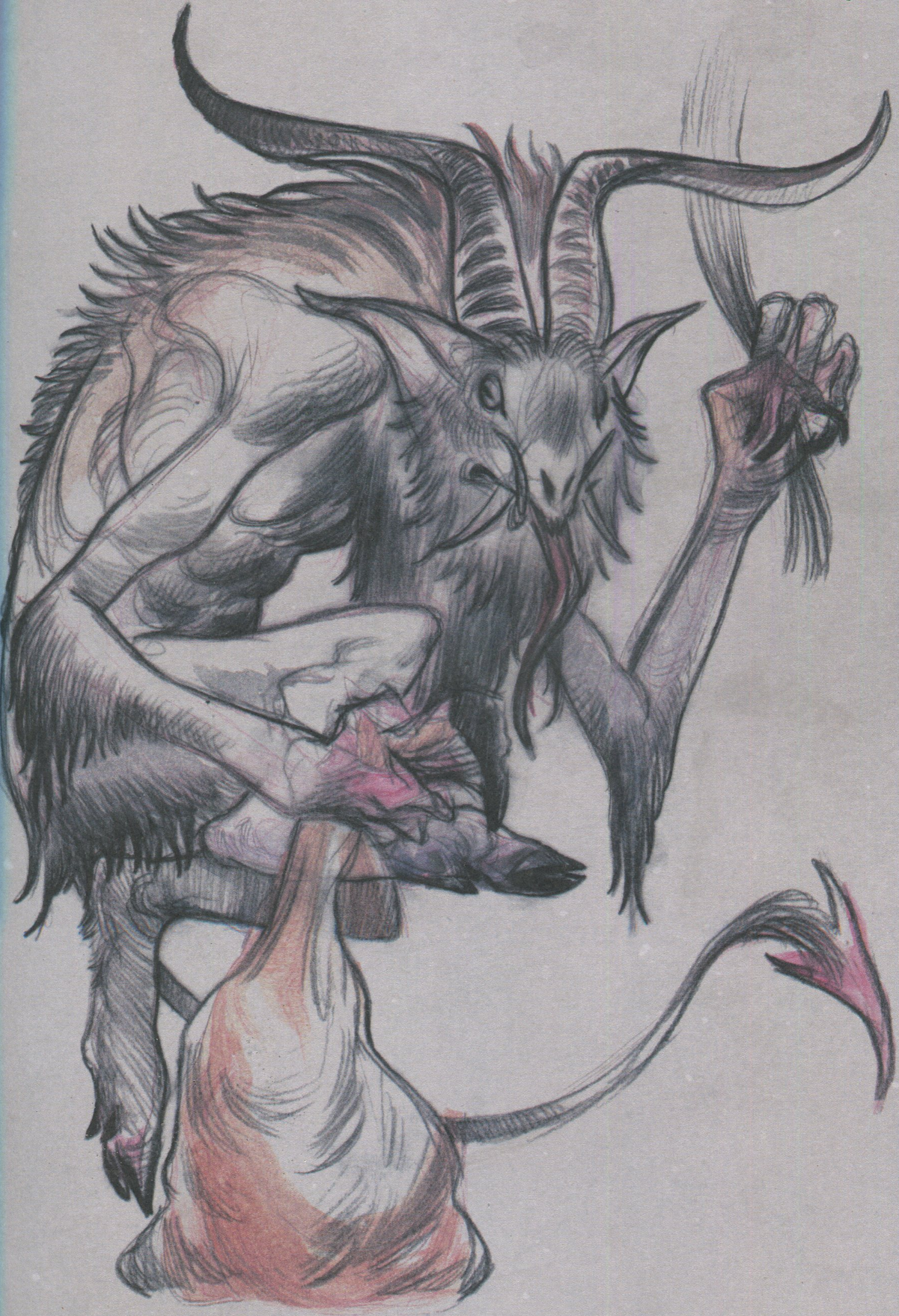
I chose a more sinewy musculature and awkward proportions to give an uncomfortable feel to the beast. I often break a lot of anatomy when developing compositions for pieces, especially when I lack backgrounds. I curve bone and muscle in areas it more than likely would not happen. Proportions are mixed and matched, which allows for a lot of disfiguring without it feeling as though I am abandoning reality completely. This works well for the demonic Krampus design. Fluctuating between angular markings and a smoother flow of lines adds texture and interest to the concept.

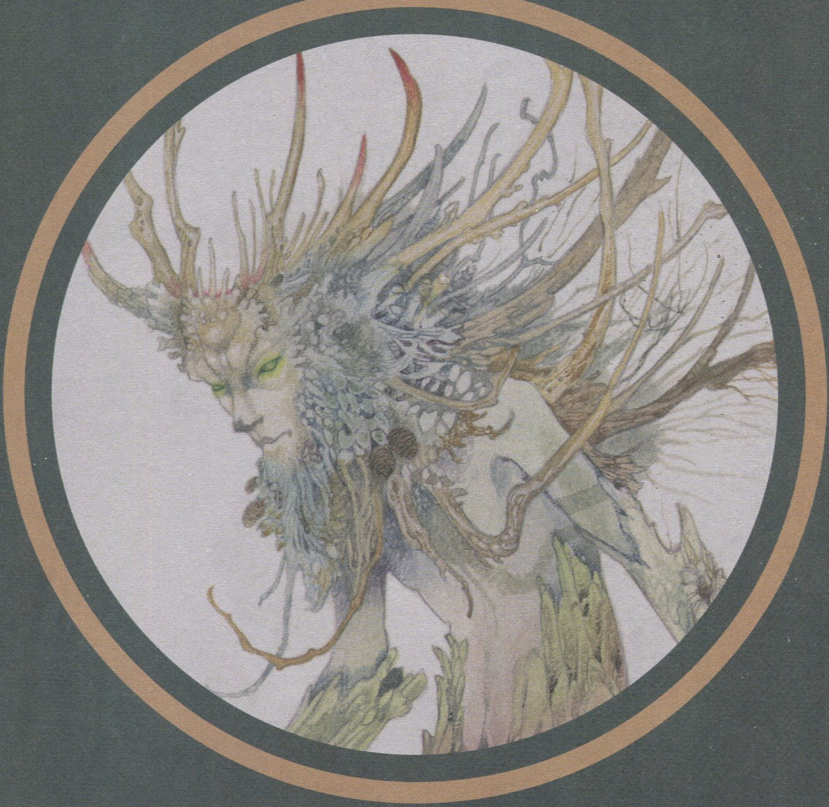


Key facts

Name: Krampus
Taxonomy: Goat, demon
Region: Germany
Habitat: Towns and villages
Mythical abilities: Carrying naughty children to Hell
Threat to humans: 2

Final image © Natalie Hall





• LESHY •

From Slavic folklore come tales of leshiye (plural of leshy). A leshy is a woodland spirit, and those who live in the shadows of the forests along the Carpathian Mountains of Eastern Europe know of these shapeshifting, trickster creatures. A leshy is most often found in the form of a humanoid male, but he may take on animal or plant aspects with foliage woven through, or with a tail, fur, horns, or hooves. As a man, he is most often seen with long hair of trailing vines and a beard of roots and grass. His eyes are a bright piercing green and his skin is white with bluish cheeks that betray the blue blood that runs in his veins. He has no shadow. In the center of a leshy's forest home, where his strength and presence are at their height, he is as tall as the trees; however, as a leshy moves towards the edges of his sphere of strength, he grows small and shrinks to the size of a blade of grass. Leshiye are mischievous spirits. They frequently lead travelers astray to wander lost in the woods, though a leshy is not evil – simply curious and fickle. They can become treacherous when angered.

• STEPHANIE LAW •

Painter • shadowscapes.com

• FIELD NOTES •

Wild animals

Since leshiye hail from the forests of Eastern Europe, it will be important to take into account what that the environment brings in terms of inspiration for the various constituent elements. Creatures that inhabit that region include brown bears, wolves, lynxes, bison, and deer. Leshiye often appear in stories in the company of bears and wolves as protectors of forest creatures. When incorporating beast elements into the leshy's design, it will therefore be useful to borrow characteristics from these creatures.

Antlers and horns

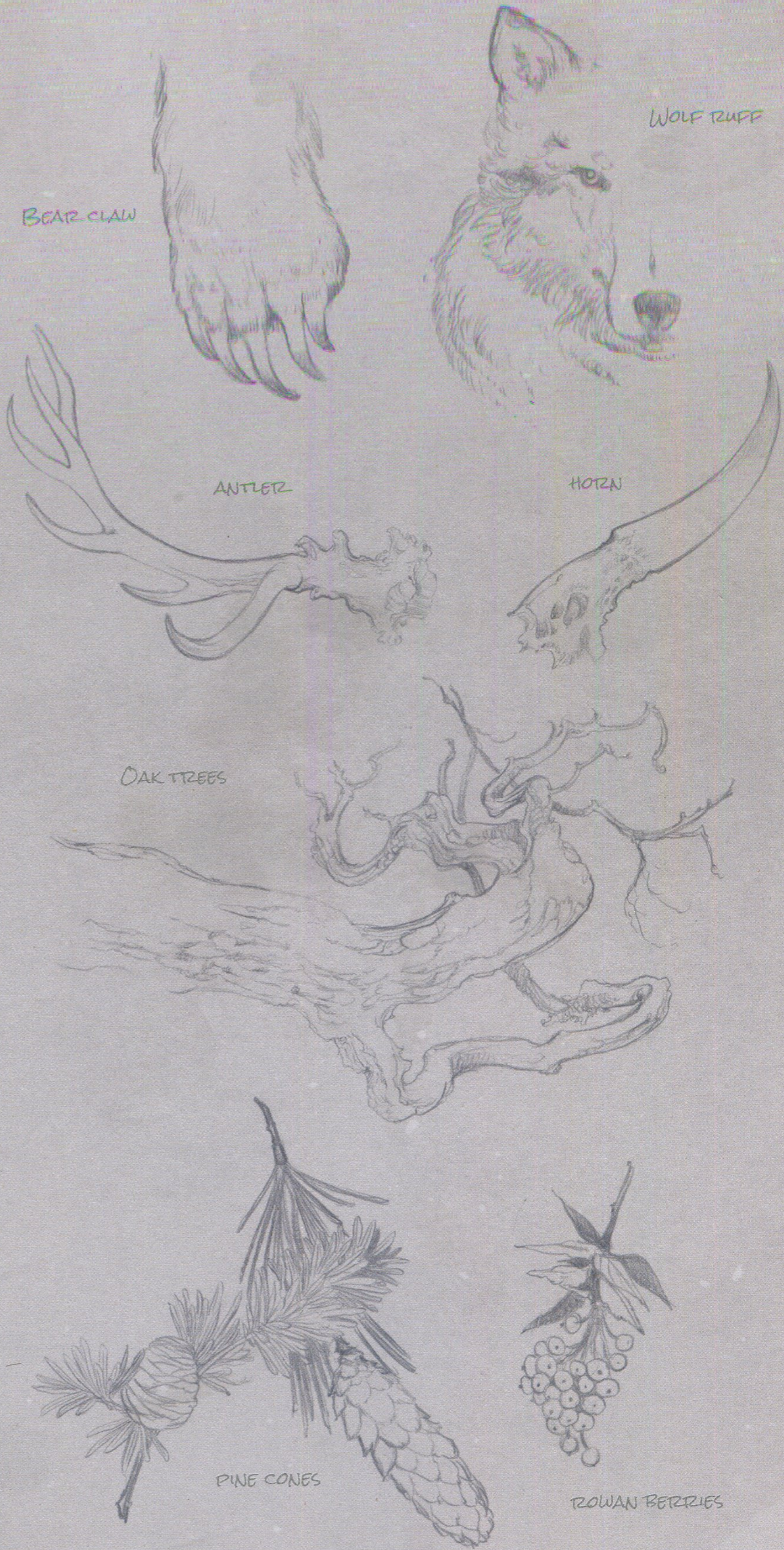
Antlers of a deer or horns of a bison can also contribute to the leshy's design. Antlers would easily meld with the wildly twisted branches of live oak, and the textures at the base of a horn have a wonderful knobby aspect that lends itself well to the rough and craggy features of a leshy. These are elements that I can blend with plant aspects so that the leshy borrows from both the animal and plant kingdom in a shape-changing mixture.

Oak trees

Moving on with the botanical element, I need to keep in mind the region that leshy folklore comes from, so I explore the types of plants found in these mountainous woodlands. Many species of oak tree can lend their twisting and sinuous branches to the beard and gnarled features of the leshy. The crooked branches are sometimes reminiscent of a human body shape or hunched figure.

Conifers and berries

The pine cones of conifers, such as the silver fir and Norway spruce, would offer a pleasing contrast of texture in the twisting locks of vine that comprise the leshy's tangled hair. Rowan berries would add bright splashes of color against the greens, browns, and woody textures. All of these will help to enhance the chaotic meld that is a leshy's being. Leaves – fresh and green, as well as crinkled and dry – would also add interest, especially in close-up portrait compositions.

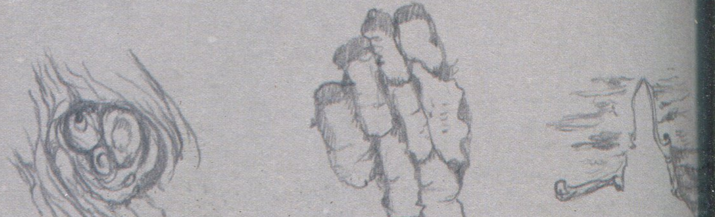


Bark-like skin

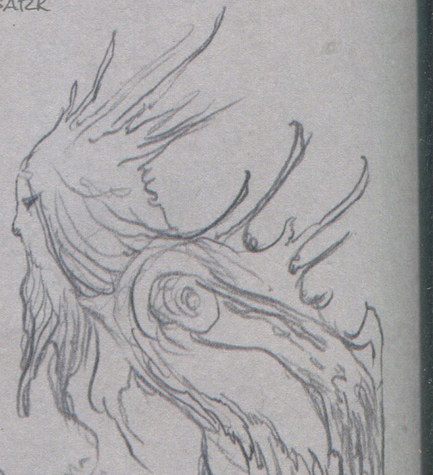
Since a leshy is a shape-changing creature and elementally tied to forests, one of the aspects I will need to focus on is its bark-like skin. I take into consideration the kinds of tree I want to borrow from and look at how that kind of texture wraps itself around the limbs of a tree. Some kinds of bark are deep and craggy. Other kinds are paper-thin and peel off in curling strips. Sometimes bark forms into twisted whorls around knots or truncated limbs. All of these are textural elements that I can play with and explore. I want to mix different types of textures around the curves and lines of the leshy's body so that they complement the flow of his face, features, and limbs.

Rather than rendering and completely covering every square inch of the leshy's body with craggy bark texture, I will concentrate on developing the parts where I want to most focus the viewer's attention, such as the face and hands, depending on the pose. The rest of the creature's rendering can be hinted at with these textures. Over-rendering just leads to a flattened dimensionality and lack of focus for the eyes of the viewer. It is important to be aware of and control your desires to overdo this kind of very particular texturing. I take into consideration the shape of the leshy's body and how some forms of texturing will be more complementary than others. For example a knobby whorl of bark might be better suited to an elbow than somewhere in the middle of his neck; a deep, hollow, craggy etching of bark might be very well suited to the edges of his face and surrounding the sockets of his eyes.

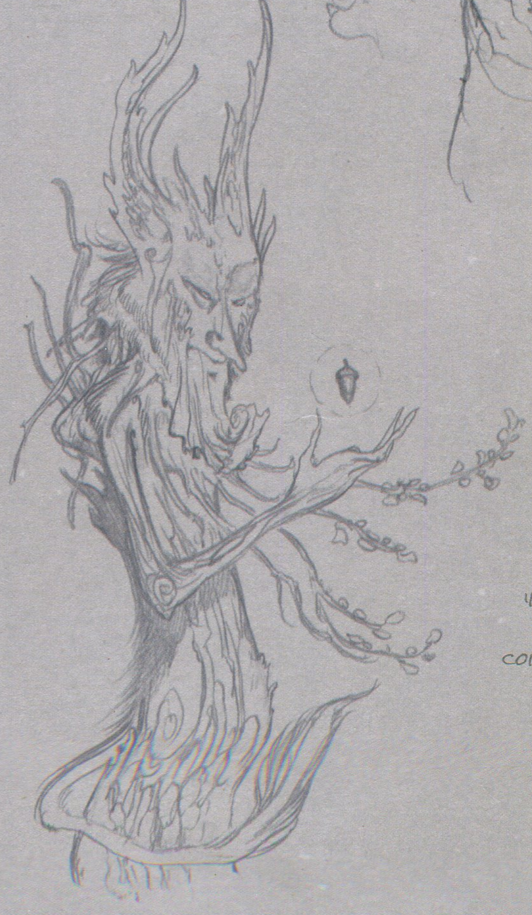
To add interest to the design, it would be useful to consider other ways the bark-like skin could be used. Some folktales speak of how a leshy has fur, and the contrast of bark melding into soft edges of fur would be an interesting effect. I could also fade human flesh into a shallow-etched bark texture, or into the rolling paper-like curls of a birch tree. Knots and whorls are well suited to joints, craggy deep-etched bark to the body and horns, and papery curls to the edges of the face or beard. I let the elements complement the flow of the figure. The selection of textures and where to employ them can drastically change the character and appearance of a design. A face that has very little flesh and consists mostly of the textures of flora will seem much more alien than one which appears mostly human and only borrows from trees along the edges of its features. The latter would feel more like *something that is closely related to human beings, while the former would be a true spirit of the woods.*



RESEARCHING TYPES OF BARK



SELECTING THE BEST AREAS TO RENDER



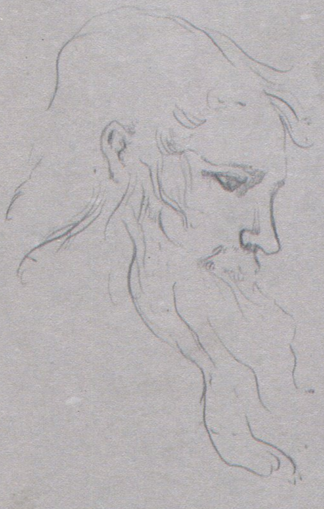
INTEGRATING DIFFERENT COMPLEMENTARY ELEMENTS

-like hair

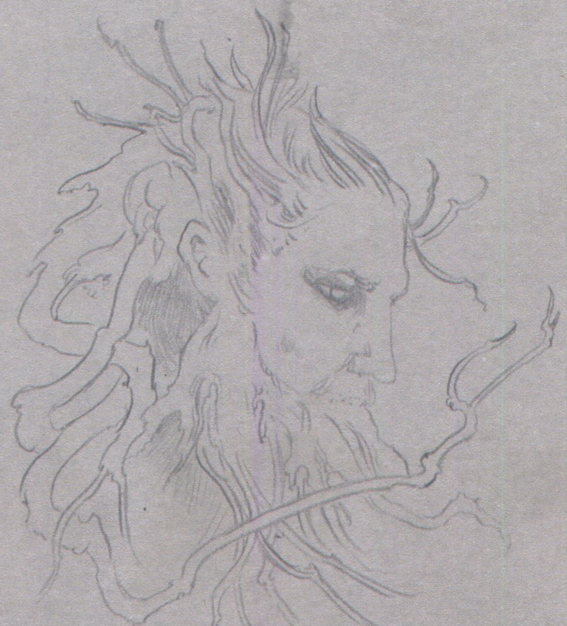
it comes to vine-like hair, the process y similar to how you would normally ach hair. I start with the overall shape want to create. Beginning with a familiar n male's face is an easy way to start. k about how I might want the hair to around horns, and the general shape bearded leshy. I avoid drawing all the and tangles at an early stage and try to on a higher level, focusing on structure shadows. I keep in mind the power of just ng at shapes and forms, and utilize that eate an interesting shape rather than a ass of unnecessary details.

e I have settled on the main forms, I begin dd in more defined shapes. I go back to types of plants found in the forests of the hive and picture wild, tangled undergrowth. ead of trying to define strands of hair, I nk in terms of clumps and shape those into vines and roots that will form the structure he leshy's hair and beard, making sure the ists and tangles never become too regular. ure is chaotic. I keep the design randomized not too evenly coiled or branched. I allow structures to diminish from their thickest he roots and hairlines, to the thinnest at the s, like plants would taper towards their ends.

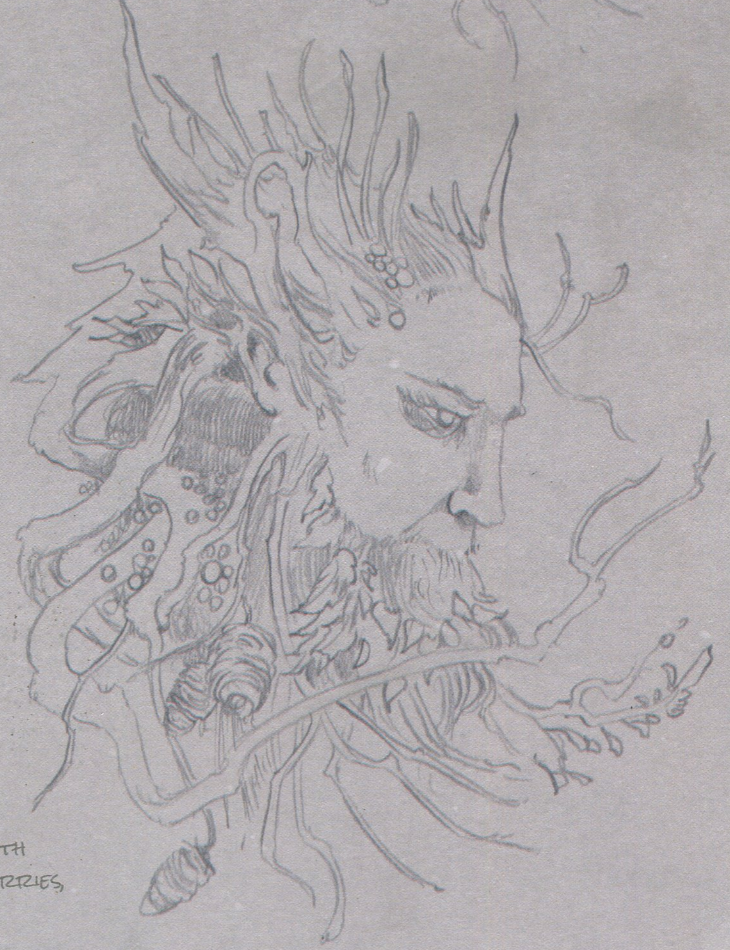
then flesh out more character by perimenting with the textures and shaping vines. I add leaves, pine cones, and rowan rries to create further visual interest. I fill the tips of the vines with bushy details, fferent elements tucked into the crevices, and ngled knots. The vines blend into the gnarled atures of the leshy so that they don't appear simply be superimposed on him; it is not just coration that he has donned, but a part of his ing that is growing from him.



FOCUSING ON STRUCTURE



KEEPING THE SHAPES RANDOMIZED



EXPERIMENTING WITH LEAVES, PINE CONES, BERRIES, AND KNOTS

• DESIGN PROCESS •

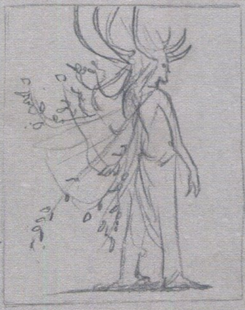
Thumbnails

The thumbnails below explore a range of concepts, from creature-of-the-woods to more man-like leshy. The more shapeshifter elements that are incorporated into the leshy, the more alien he becomes, making him more like a spirit of the woods. At the other end of the spectrum the leshy appears more relatable as a humanoid creature, which in some ways emphasizes his trickster character as if he tries to look as human as possible in order to interact with and snare unwary travelers into his quixotic games. I experimented with both plant and animal elements within both of these variations. Different kinds of horns gave a ferocious quality, while deer antlers bestowed a majestic grandeur. Claws of a beast added a feral touch, and the use of fur or a tail also hinted at a bestial nature.

Scale is another aspect I wanted to keep in mind as I sketched these thumbnails. A giant leshy towering above the trees would be better portrayed from below so as to emphasize his height. A tiny grass-sized leshy would benefit from either a tightly cropped view of him close-up, or else a view that looks upon him from above and hidden among grass.

Another way to indicate scale is through the depiction of the foliage elements that adorn his body. If the leaves are very large, that would imply that the leshy is small; if the leaves are very tiny it indicates his large bulky size.

01



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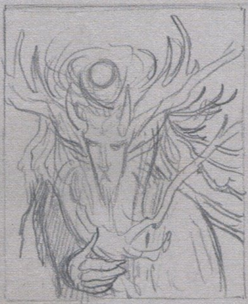

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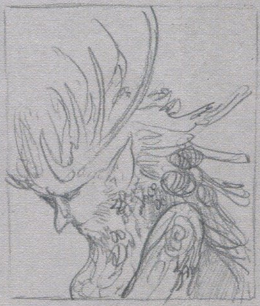

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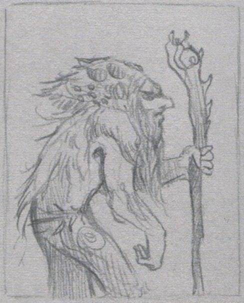

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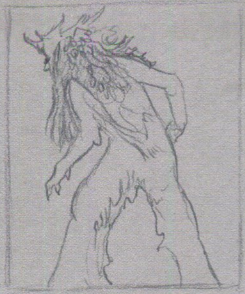

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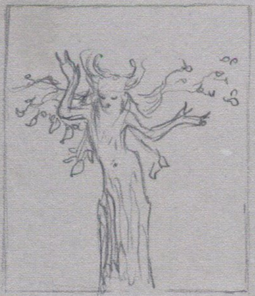

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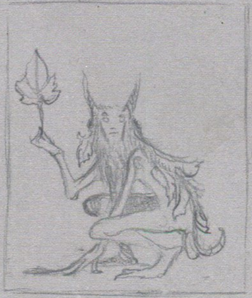

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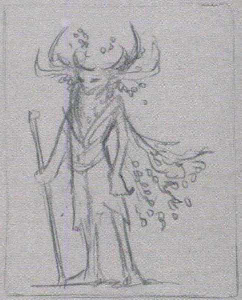

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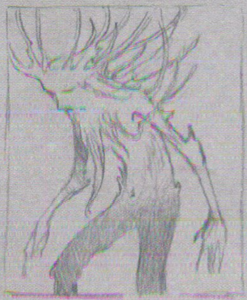

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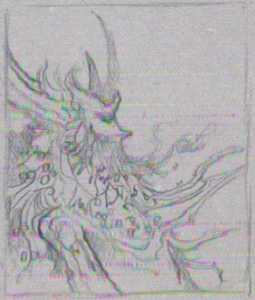

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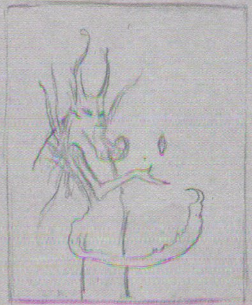

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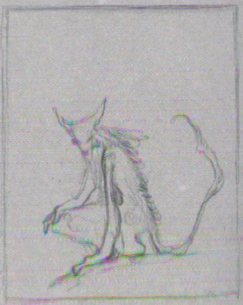
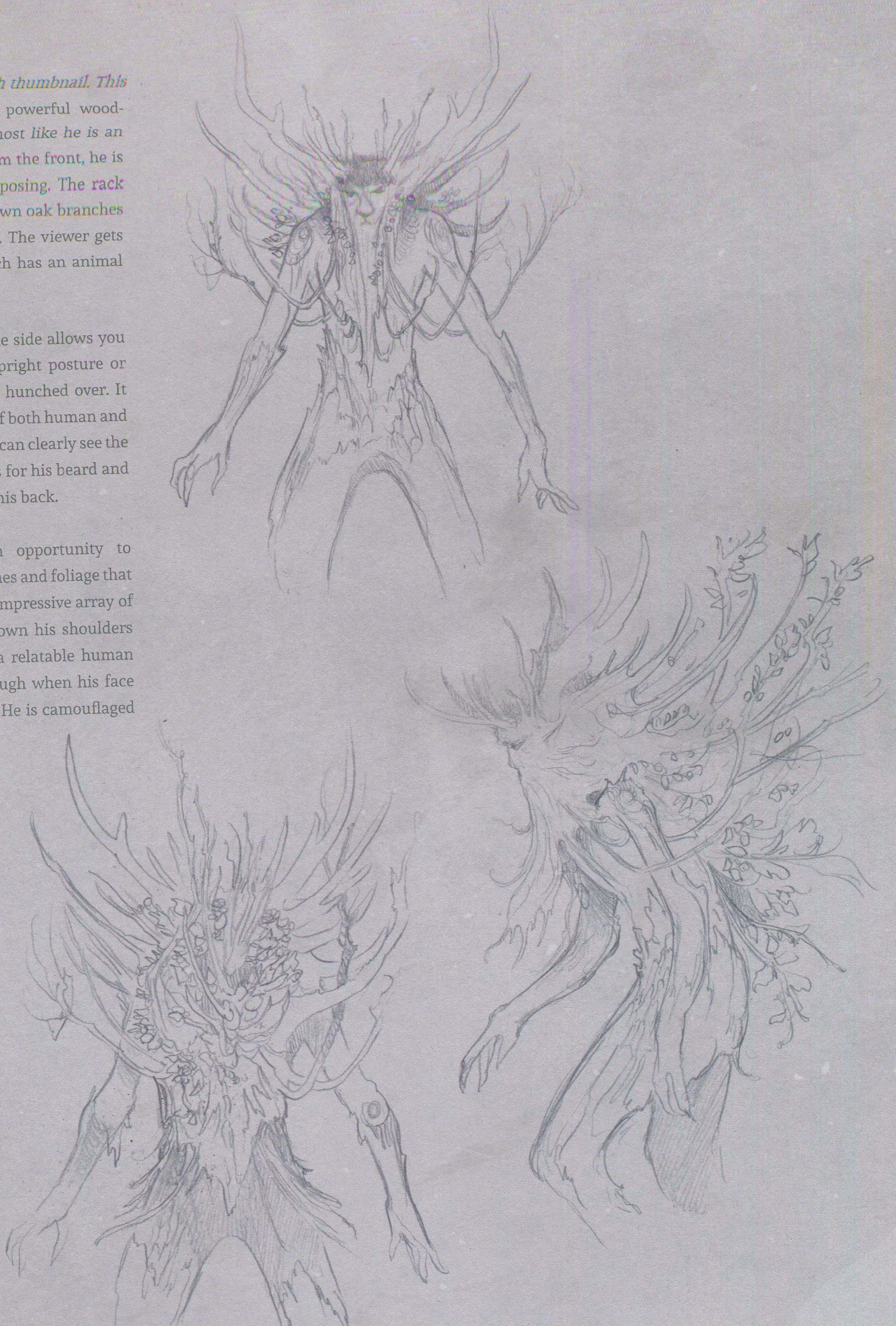


Further exploration

I decided to go with the ninth thumbnail. This is one that emphasizes the powerful wood-spirit aspect of the leshy, almost like he is an ancient god of the forest. From the front, he is very confrontational and imposing. The rack of antlers melds with overgrown oak branches and tangled vines and leaves. The viewer gets a clear view of his face, which has an animal quality to it.

Sketching the design from the side allows you to choose between a very upright posture or something more beastly and hunched over. It is a good view for a mixture of both human and plant elements, as the viewer can clearly see the overgrown tangle that passes for his beard and hair, and which flows down his back.

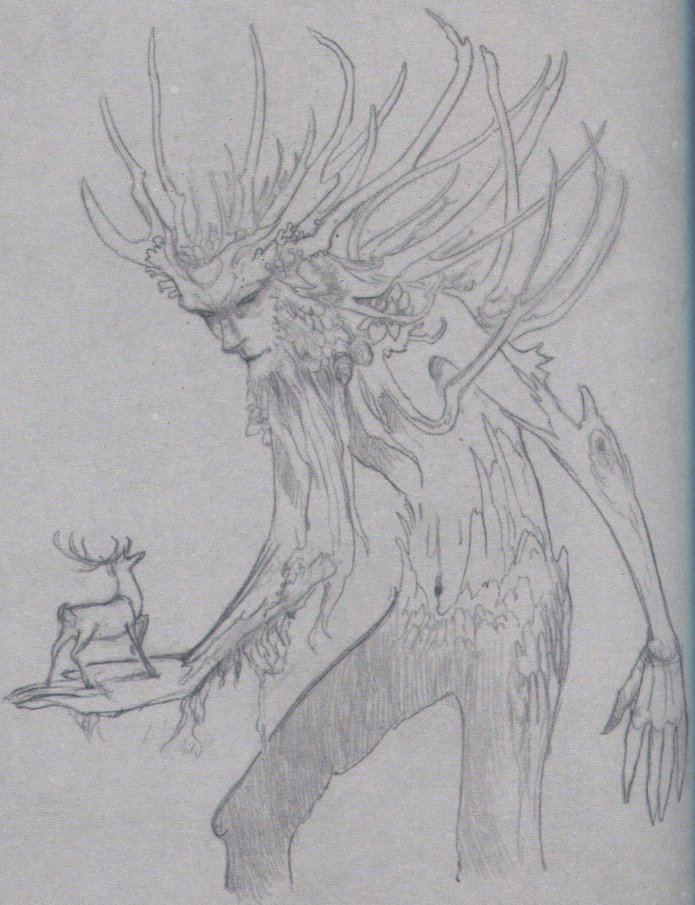
From behind there is an opportunity to elaborate on the tangle of vines and foliage that trails from his hair and the impressive array of branches and twigs that crown his shoulders and back. There is less of a relatable human element from this view though when his face and features are so hidden. He is camouflaged with the forest.

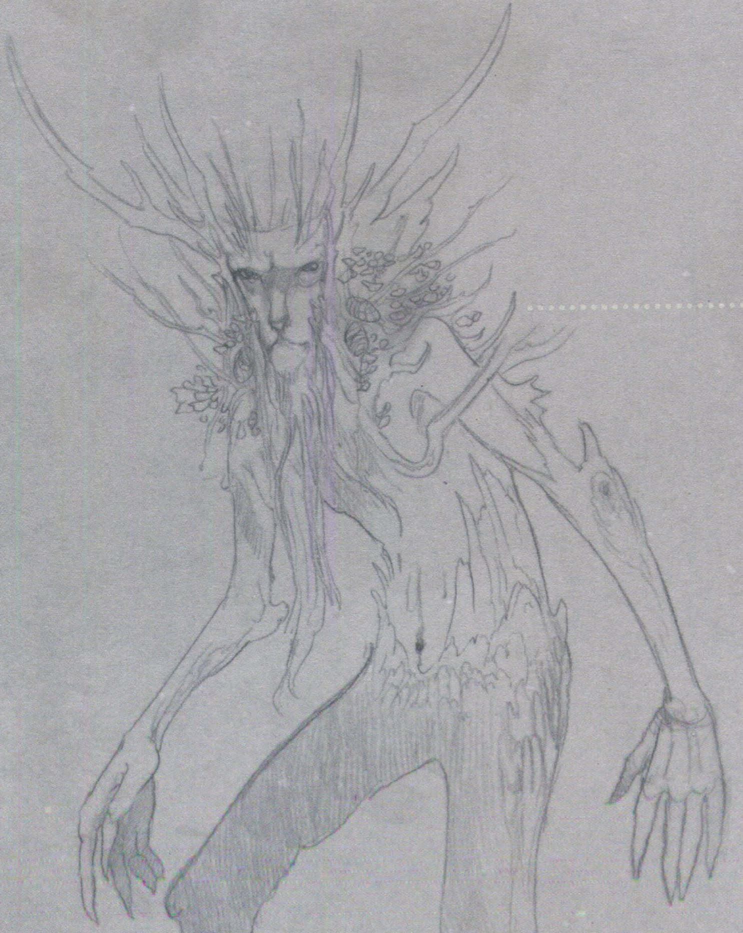


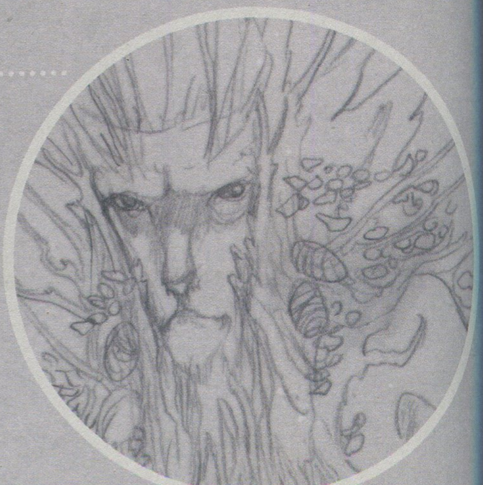
Poses

The first pose shown here gives the viewer a good indication of size. Scale is hinted at by the leaves and foliage that decorate his beard, but additionally the leshy's towering height is made evident by the deer that stands on his palm. Compared to the leshy, the deer is like a toy figurine, dwarfed by this spirit of the forest. The leshy's face is turned more towards the deer, but the viewer is still able to observe his key features and eyes.

I like the three-quarter pose shown below because it blends the best aspects of both front and side views. It allows for a very relatable human element as his face can be seen; in a colored version it will allow for his vibrant green eyes to be featured. The leshy confronts the viewer, but the labyrinth of branches that completes his shoulders and back can also be featured.







• SUBSPECIES •

Giant leshy

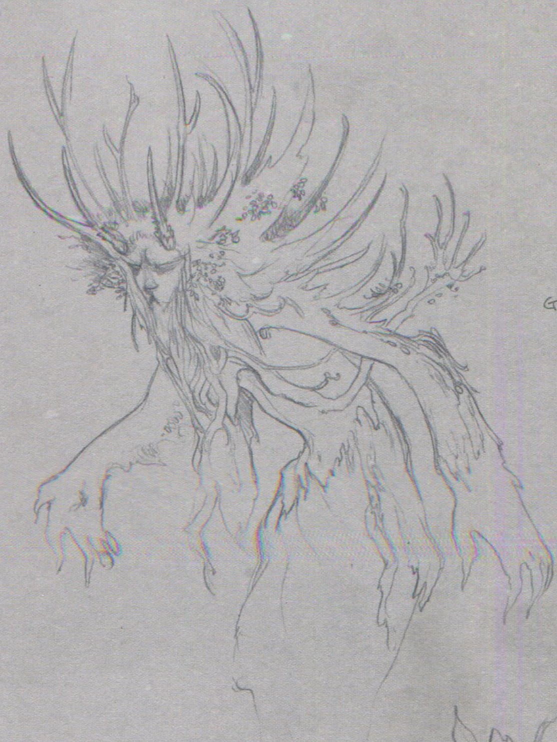
This subspecies of leshy has a wild and feral nature. His towering size is made apparent by the comparative size of the foliage that is twined into his hair and beard. The relatively small leaves that adorn him indicate that he is of larger stature. He is a shapeshifter, which you can see with the more animal form of his nose and brow and his beastly claws. The spread of his antlers creates an impressive silhouette, reflecting his powerful presence as a god of the forest.

Sprite leshy

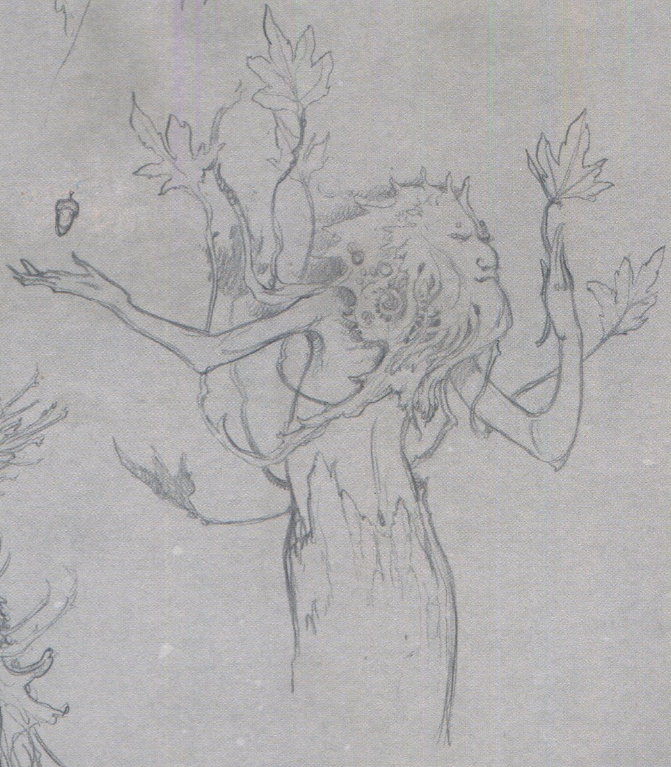
You will note that the relatively large leaves on this leshy imply that his physical size is rather small. This subspecies is known for its sprite-like appearance and for being mischievous: he is the type of creature that might hide in the hollows of hills and wait to wreak trickster-havoc on an unsuspecting traveler entering the boundaries of his woods. He is all knobby elbows and knees, with a sly, puckish smirk on his face. He taunts and entices.

Sapiens leshy

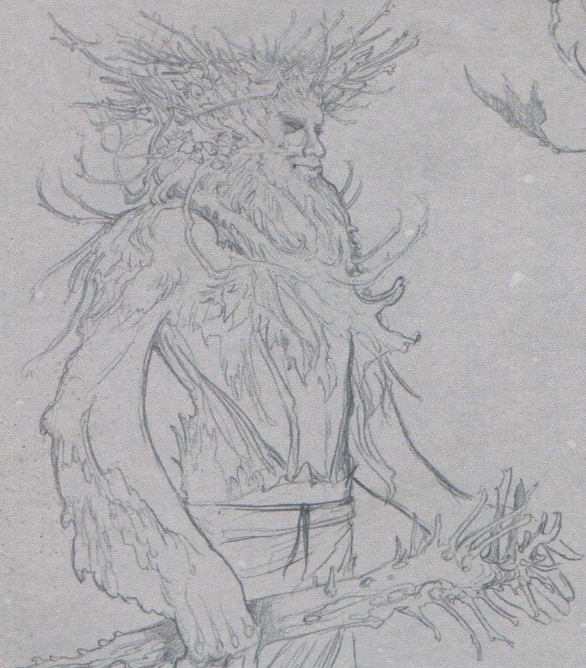
The sapiens leshy has more human-like proportions with less shapeshifter features. Instead of bearing deer-like antlers like those of his cousins, a nest of twigs forms a regal-looking crown upon his brow. Clothing further enhances the more human aspect, but this is melded into the roots and vines so that even if he attempts to put on the trappings of a mortal human, it is clear he is an otherworldly creature of the woods. His threatening-looking weapon reflects his more aggressive nature.



GIANT LESHY



SPRITE LESHY

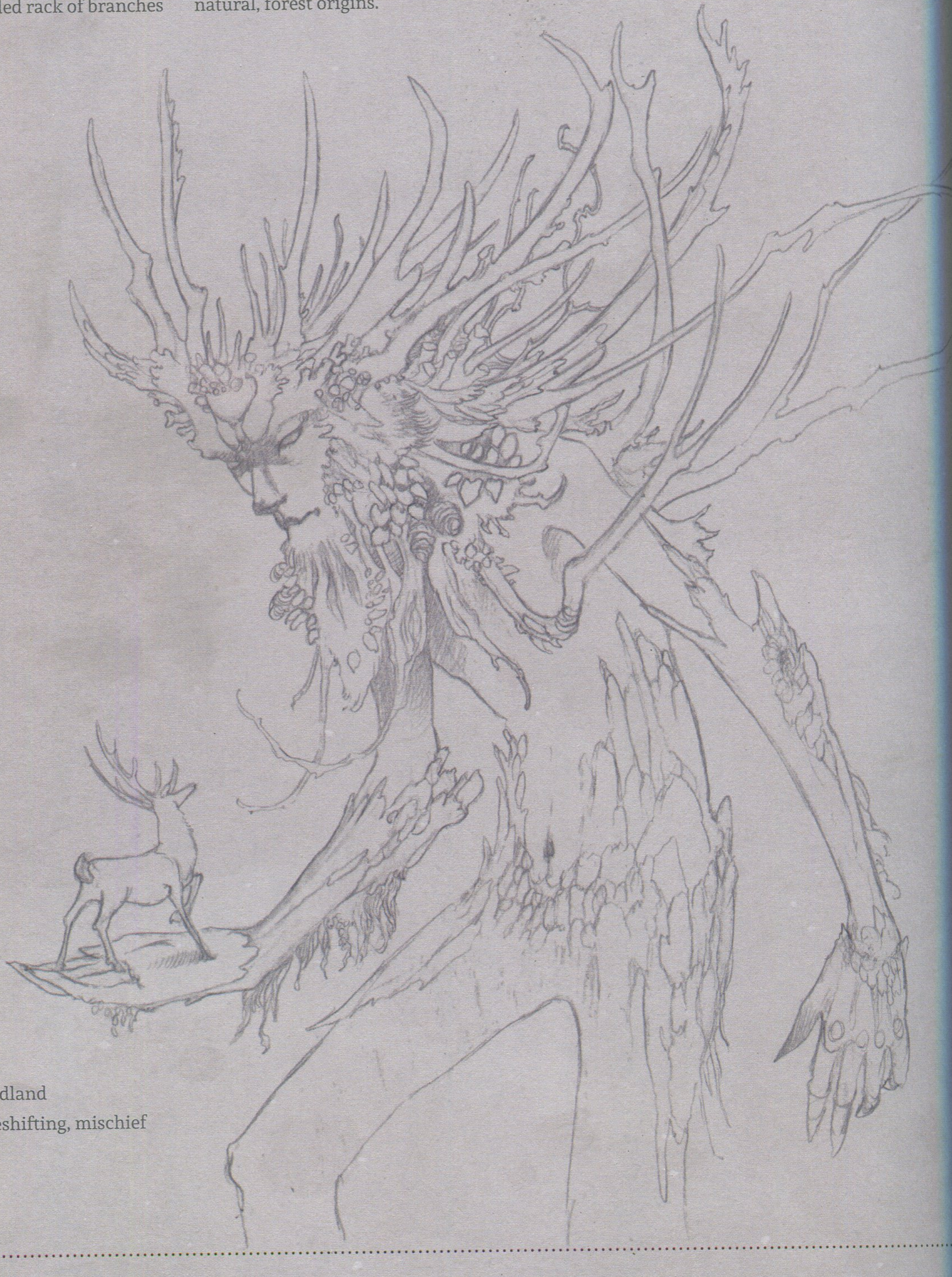


SAPIENS LESHY

• FINAL DESIGN •

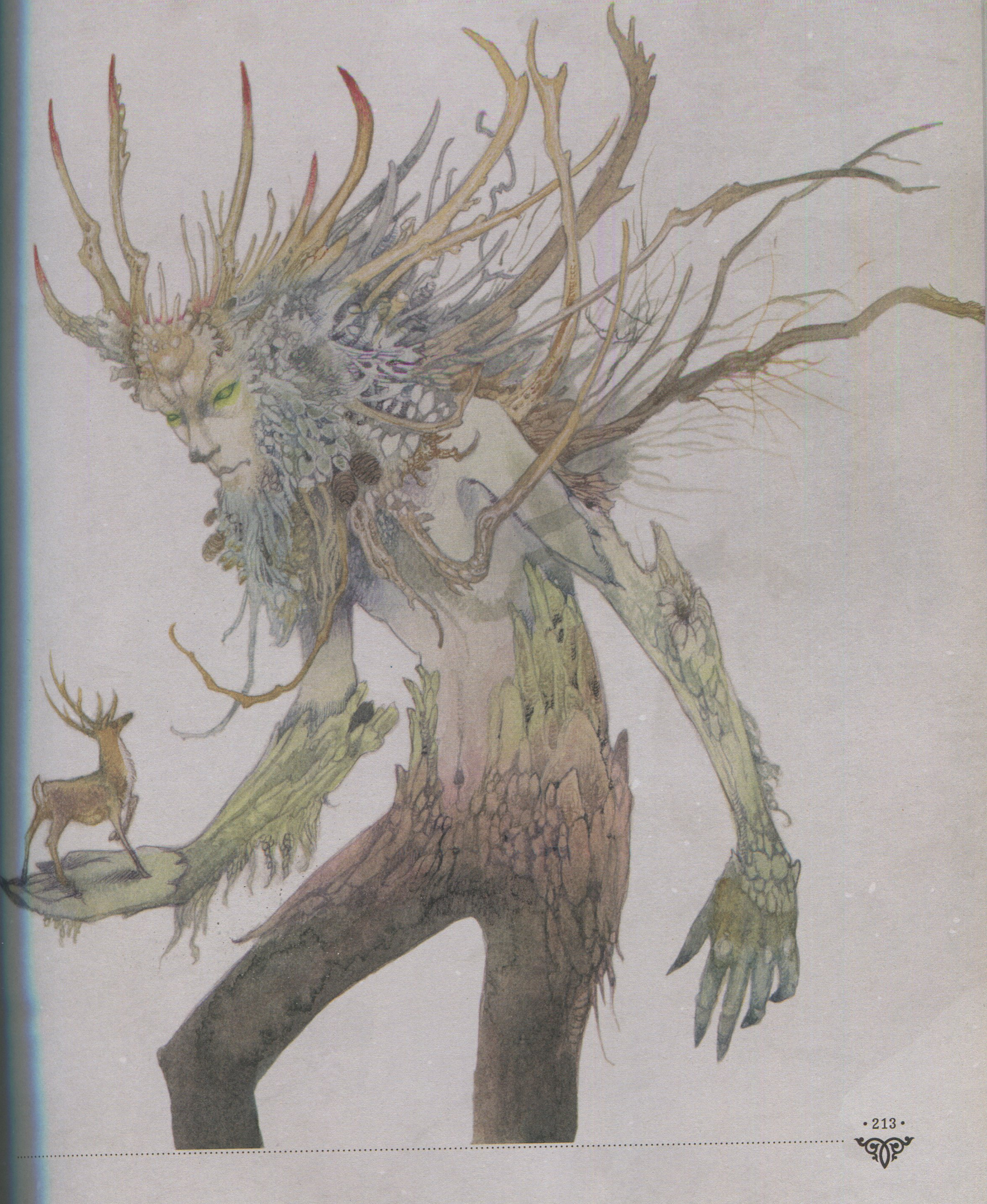
The final design of the leshy shows the beast in his element. He towers above the forest because he is in his peak position of power at the center of the woods. The stag that he holds in his hand is dwarfed by his size. I wanted to show the kindred spirit he has with that stag: there is a kinship in the way his tangled rack of branches and vines echoes those of the deer, and he is protective and gentle as he lifts the creature.

You can see the bright green eyes as spoken of in folklore. The rest of the leshy's coloring is soothing and harmonized, emphasizing his natural, forest origins.

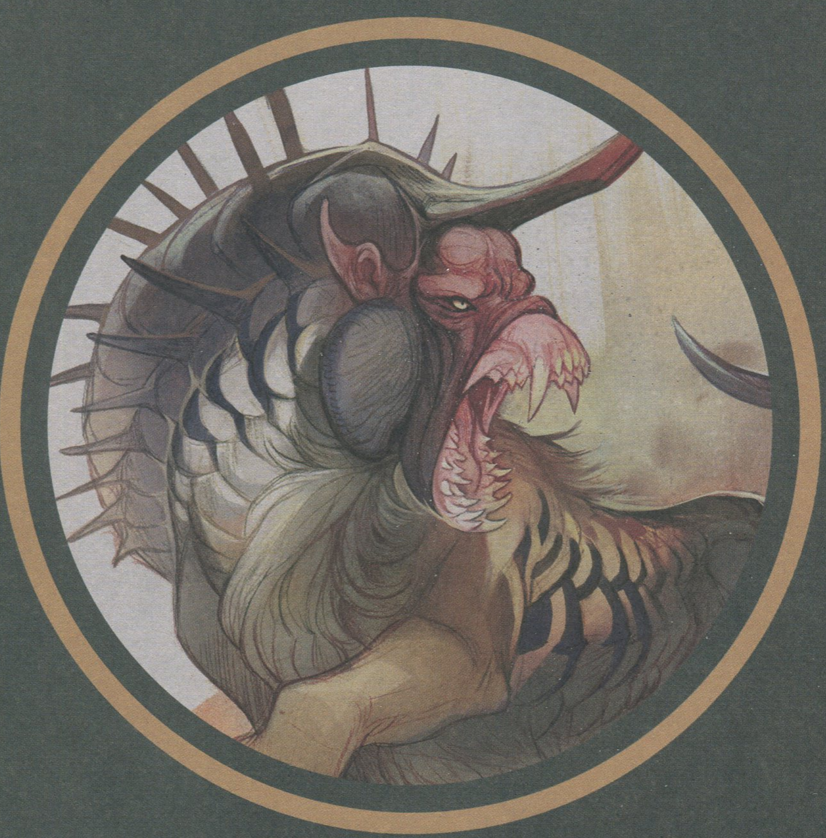


Key facts

Name: Leshy
Taxonomy: Tree, human
Region: Slavic countries
Habitat: Forests and woodland
Mythical abilities: Shapeshifting, mischief
Threat to humans: 1



Final image © Stephanie Law



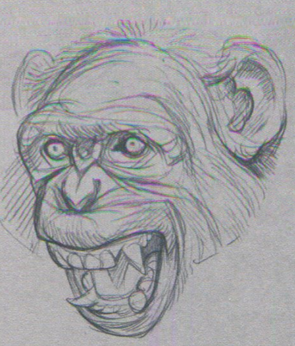
• MANTICORE •

The manticore or martikhora is a popular hybrid monster of Persian origin, carried through to Ethiopian, Indian, and Mesopotamian legends and beyond. Believed to have been inspired by tigers, rumors of the beast eventually made their way to the excitable Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder, whose description of the creature in *Historia Naturalis* (AD 77) is from which most modern descriptions still originate. Its name comes from the Persian *mardkhora*, meaning man-slayer (which it is very good at doing) and its form is something of a chimerical hodgepodge. The body and feet of a lion, head of a man, and a spiny scorpion tail are the basics. Pliny also described the creature as possessing a shark-like triple row of teeth and wrote of its ability to shoot massive stingers from its tail like arrows. It seems few understood how spines, stingers, or porcupine quills worked in ancient Greece, as you will find this projectile spine concept frequently making an appearance in mythology.

• KATE PFEILSCHIEFTER •

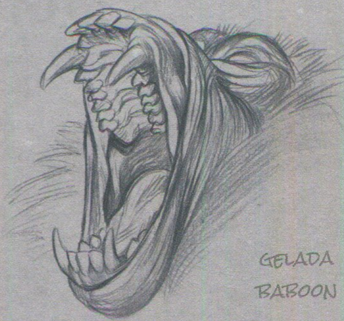
Concept artist & 3D creature artist • katepfeilschiefterart.com

• FIELD NOTES •



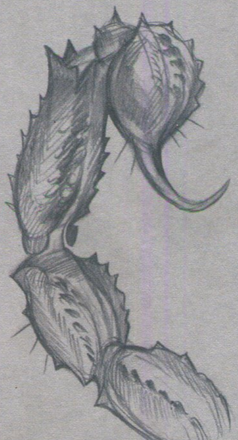
Primates

When approaching any mythological creature I like to remember certain facts about how real animals first became known to distant cultures. In China a giraffe was once described as a leopard camel; in Europe a rhinoceros was a horned horse. I like to use such examples to reverse engineer mythological animals. Recalling something described as having the head of X, and body of Y doesn't necessitate a literal Frankenstein creature, but something for which someone had no other method of describing. Therefore for the manticore's head I will lean less towards an English gentleman and more towards primates and carnivores.



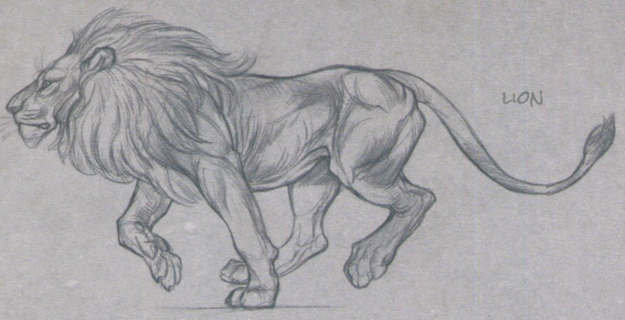
Gelada baboons

Gelada baboons have a lot of interesting wrinkles that form when they fold their upper lip back over their noses. They do this when yawning or threat displaying. It might be interesting to incorporate this into the design. The manticore could have its many layers of teeth hidden until it grimaces and folds its lip back over its face to reveal the massive maw. The teeth themselves might be less mammalian and more fish-like, as sharks are an example of real-world creatures that have multiple rows of teeth.



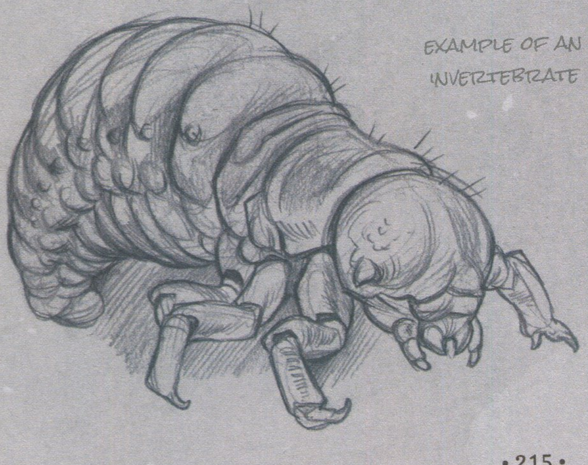
Scorpions

When choosing reference I don't look for something that I can copy and paste onto the creature, but rather something that has interesting shape language that can be broken down and repurposed. I will likely not use a real scorpion tail, or even necessarily something derivative of a scorpion, but if I use the same kind of shape language – the obvious bulb containing the venom, the segmented aspects, and the spiny, bumpy texture – then it will still read as a vessel for delivering a painful sting.



Lions

The lion is a very brawny, stocky big cat and will serve as the base for the body of the manticore. A vertebrate mammal mixed with the tail of an invertebrate like a scorpion is going to look like creative taxidermy unless I successfully blend the two together. Sprinkling invertebrate influences throughout the body rather than stopping them at the tail will help blend the two creatures together into a cohesive animal; however the creature should still have a certain cat-like quality to its proportions and gesture, regardless of how the surface changes.



Insects

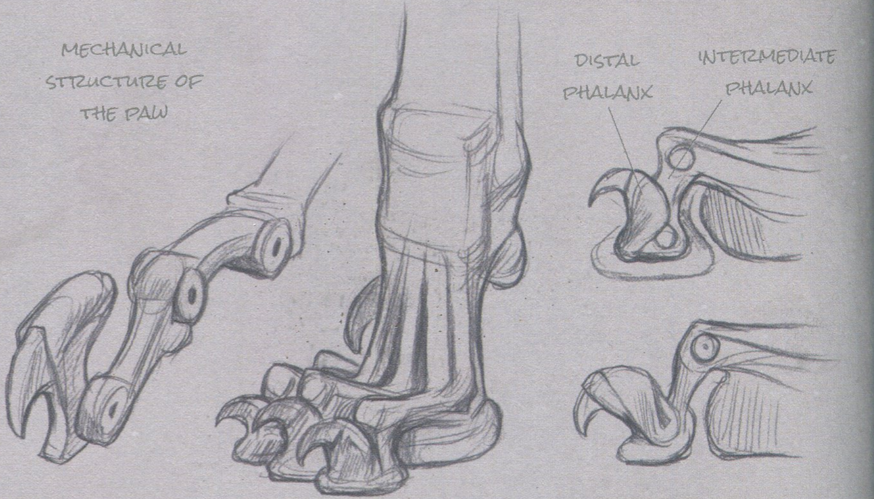
Insects provide a wide range of surface textures and segmented body layouts to draw from. They are a bit like biological robots, or armored knights, with hard-surface exoskeletons that need to fit around and contain their soft squishy parts. You can repurpose the layout of the hard-surface shapes on these tiny invertebrates into armor shapes for a vertebrate creature. I will draw from as wide a range of insects as possible to get a feel for how their shapes fit into each other and the general surface treatments there are to choose from.

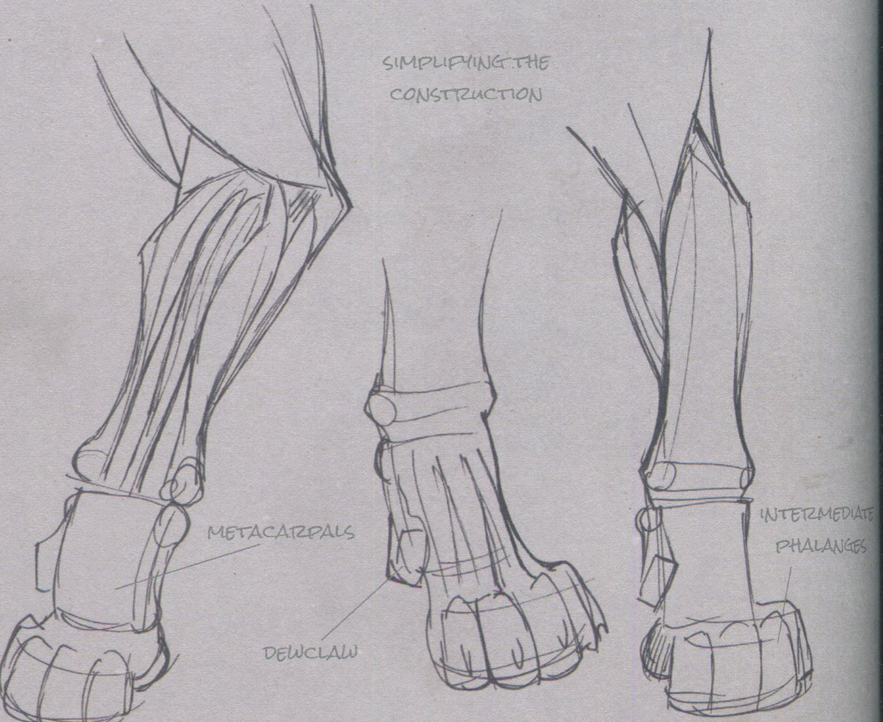
Lion paws

Specific mention of the manticore's lion paws are made in its legends, so I want to make sure I retain some elements of their form in the monster. Paws are one of those deceptive features that tend to be more complex once you begin diving into their underlying structure. There is a lot of bone and ligament articulation that is packed into a very small space, and for cats this is doubly true due to their retractile claws. This is made possible due to the almost wine-bottle-opener shape of the last two phalanges, which allows the distal phalanges to almost nestle inside the intermediate phalanges when they are folded backwards.

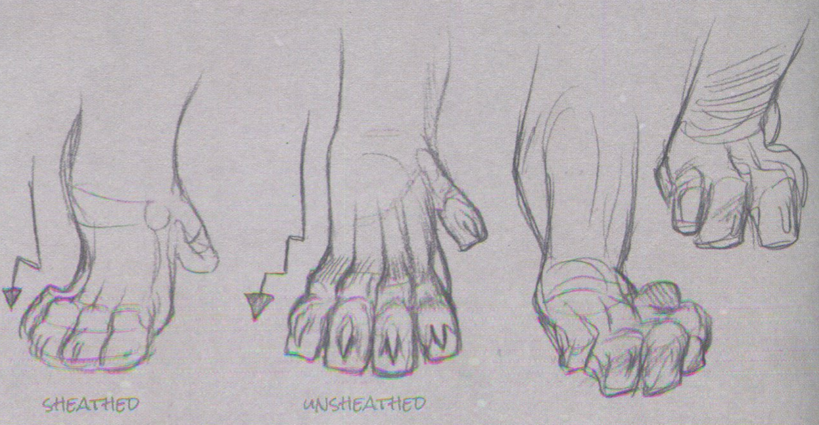
A cat paw can generally be broken up into a cylinder to indicate the wrist on the front paw, an outwardly curved rectangle for the metacarpals (or metatarsals for the hind paws), four boxes for the main "toes," and a fifth box on the inside of the paw for the dewclaw (located only on the front paws and analogous to a thumb). The sharp angle on the boxes that produces the triangular raised edge of the toes is created by the end joint of the intermediate phalanges, rather than the end of the "finger" in which the claw sits. You only really see the joint of those distal phalanges when the claws are unfolded.

Now that we have some understanding of how a paw works it is time to put it together. I keep in mind the structure of retracted versus unfolded claws, and do not over-define the joints of the paw, as a lot of the underlying structure is hidden by fur. Usually you won't see the hard edges of joints on a cat's paw unless it is hairless. This is in contrast to domestic dogs, which tend to have shorter fur and so their paw structure is usually more easily visible. It's the rounded box-like structure of a big cat's paw that sets it apart.





COMPARING SHEATHED VERSUS UNSHEATHED CLAWS



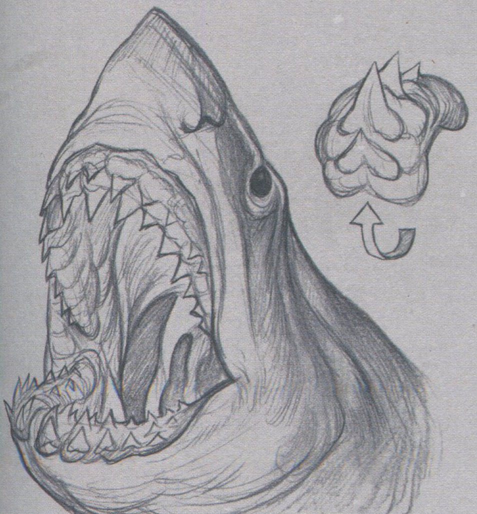
Extra rows of teeth

Depending on your desired approach for something as obscure as multiple rows of teeth, there may not be a clear right or wrong way of drawing this feature. Sharks are one of the only examples of the trait in nature, at least intentionally (hyperdontia is a condition where extra teeth accidentally form). When drawing something like teeth, it can help to remember the way teeth grow – similar to hair follicles actually – in a depression that the tooth pushes up and out of. Think of the teeth as existing on a conveyor belt, one growing behind the other, and the gums parting around them.

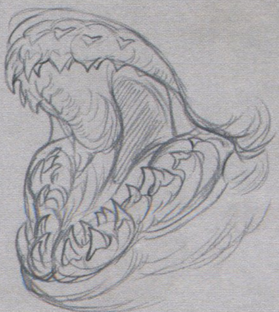
It is easy to become quite messy with something like a mouth when mixing it with shark traits. Sharks build up a lot of wear and tear, especially on their gums; their mouths are not necessarily very ordered or pretty – odd teeth are sticking up here and there and other ones have fallen out.

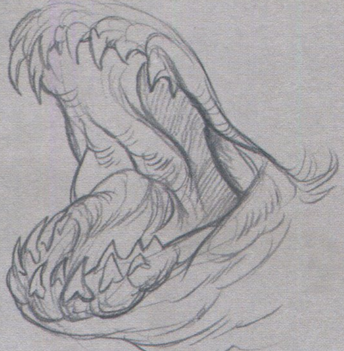
I draw the gums using convex circular shapes to make them look organic and puffy as they push up around the teeth. If the creature has a strong bite force you can also see the jaw muscles pushing into the interior of the mouth too.

I don't want to make a literal shark mouth; there is opportunity to be more creative by combining it with traits of mammalian dentition, which consists of different teeth based on the animal's diet, lifestyle, and placement in the mouth. I research different kinds of teeth (carnivores specifically) and play around with implementing incisors, canines, and carnassials (sharp slicing molars) into the creature to add variety. I experiment with non-uniformity and add a little chaos; the manticore is a crazed man-eating monster after all.

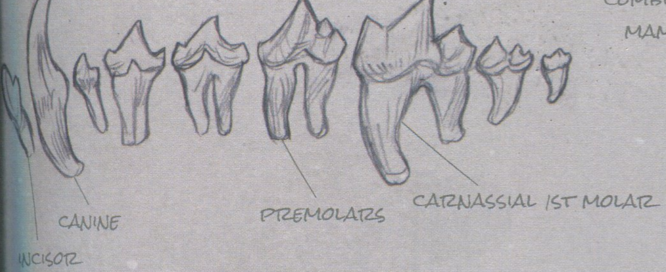


STUDYING SHARK TEETH AND HOW THEY CAN BE APPLIED TO THE MANTICORE

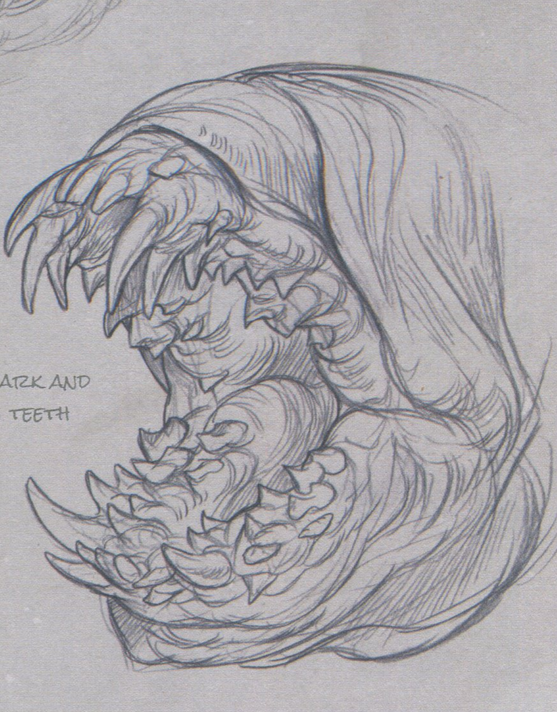




STUDYING COYOTE DENTITION (LOWER JAW)



COMBINING SHARK AND MAMMALIAN TEETH



• DESIGN PROCESS •

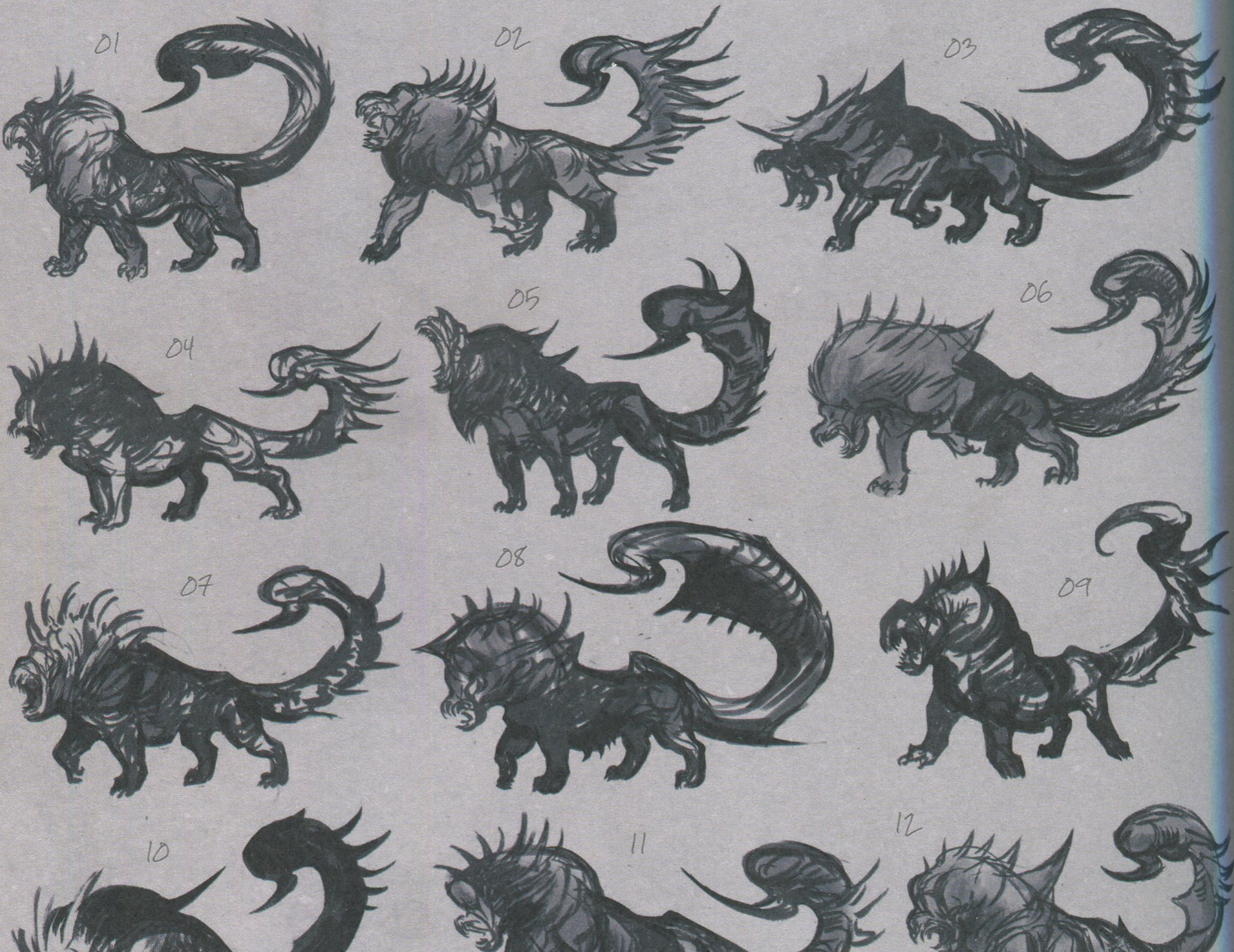
Thumbnails

Rough thumbnails like these are useful for quickly playing around with poses and proportions. At this stage detail is not as important as shape hierarchy – finding a good ratio of big to medium to small shapes. For most of the thumbnails I centered the majority of the mass towards the most important area, that of the head, building up a strong sloping back and a general silhouette similar to that of a primate.

The tail is the second most important area, being the primary attacking weapon. I want it to loom up behind the creature almost like a serpent prepared to strike, and so the body is generally slimmer leading to the tail in order to accentuate its size. Finding balance between these two elements will rely on properly utilizing areas of rest between them and integrating detail from the tail into the body so it doesn't overpower the head.

Of these twelve I personally think numbers 03, 06, 08, and 10 are most successful in regards to general shape hierarchy and silhouette. I also like the protruding forehead in 11 but its tail is not as strong as the others. The arched backs along with the tail in 06 and 10 create a strong S-shaped flow to the creature's pose that helps the eye move along the design.

Opposing examples would be 01, 02, and 05, where the tail feels less integrated into the pose. Thumbnails 04 and 07 are examples of small tails that are secondary to the head. They feel less threatening and almost unrelated to what is going on in the upper body.

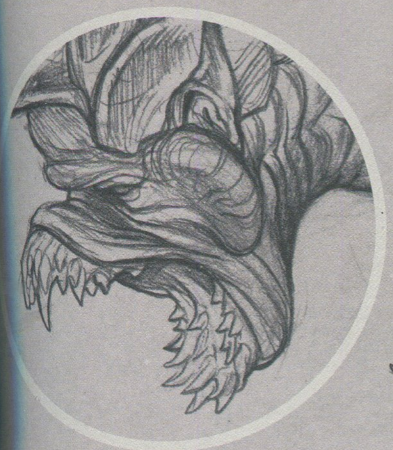


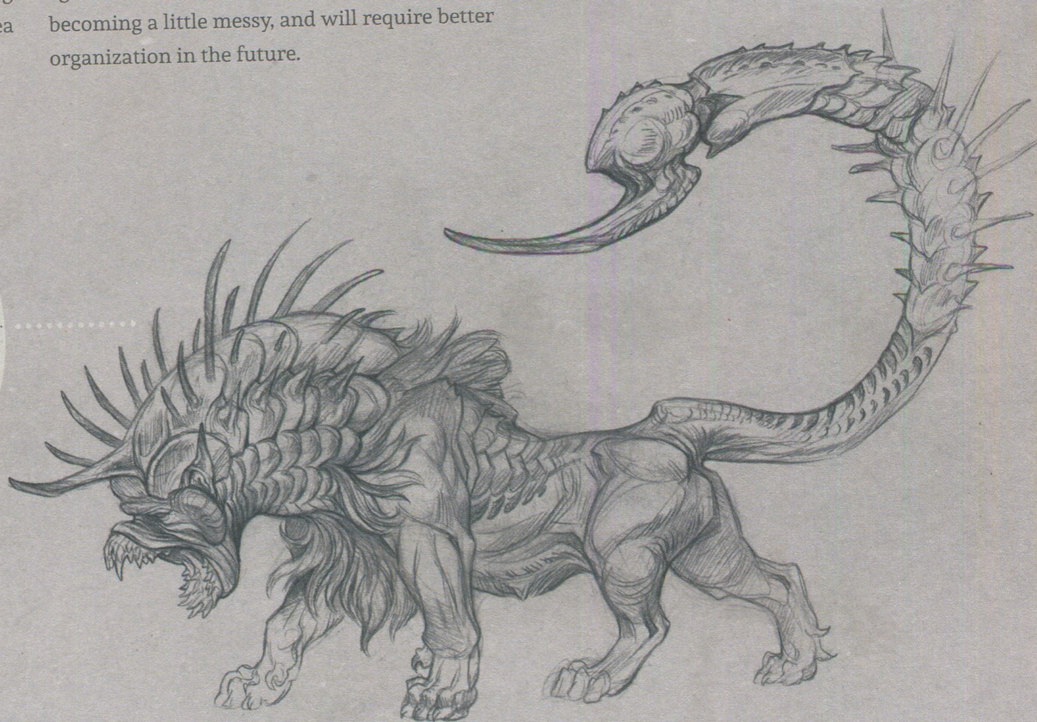
Further exploration

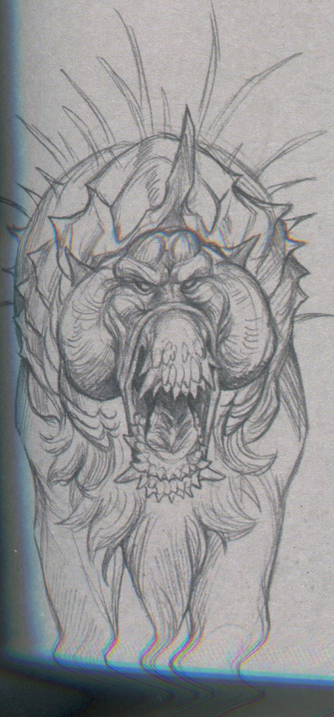
Moving forward, I chose a combination of thumbnails 03 and 08, taking the tail from 03 and the body from 08. As you can see in the profile view below, I decided to move some of the bulk away from the tail and to the head so that these two features compete less for emphasis. I also toned down some of the more invertebrate influences, concentrating them mostly on the front half of the body, and using the space between the neck and tail as an area of rest.

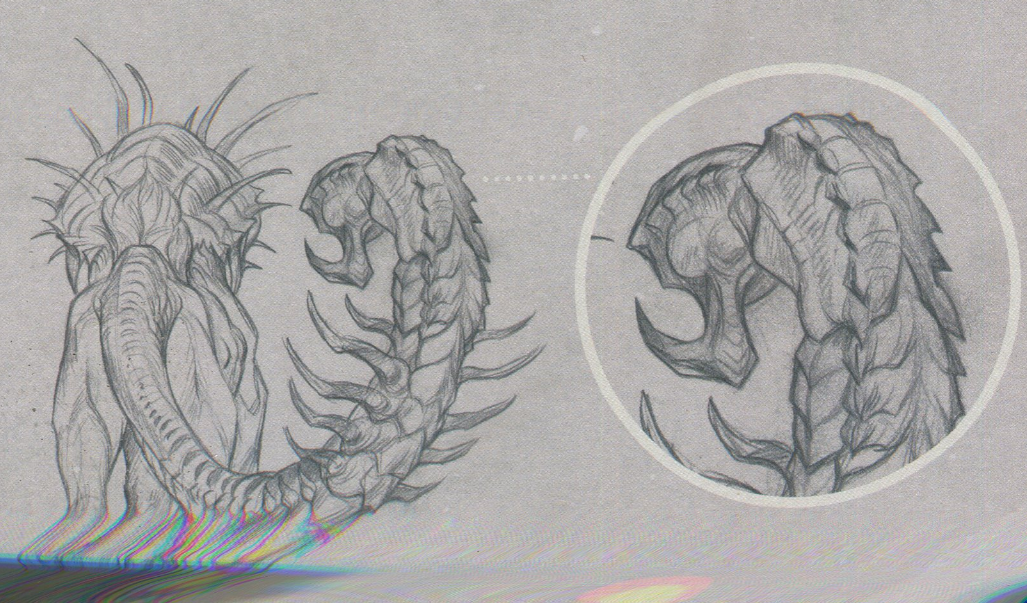
From the front you can more easily see the primate influences of the face and the orangutan-inspired cheek pads. The forearms are short, broad, and stocky, and the neck looms large behind the head, providing a sense of threat. The long hair sneaking out from under the armored scales provides an area of limited detail for the maw to stand out against. The scales on the neck, however, are becoming a little messy, and will require better organization in the future.

The back view provides a sense of what a cross section of the neck might look like, with the muscle anchoring the tail to the pelvis, and the ridges flowing along the spine of the tail itself. I am still not entirely happy with how the various sections of the tail merge into each other so I will likely simplify this further in the final design.





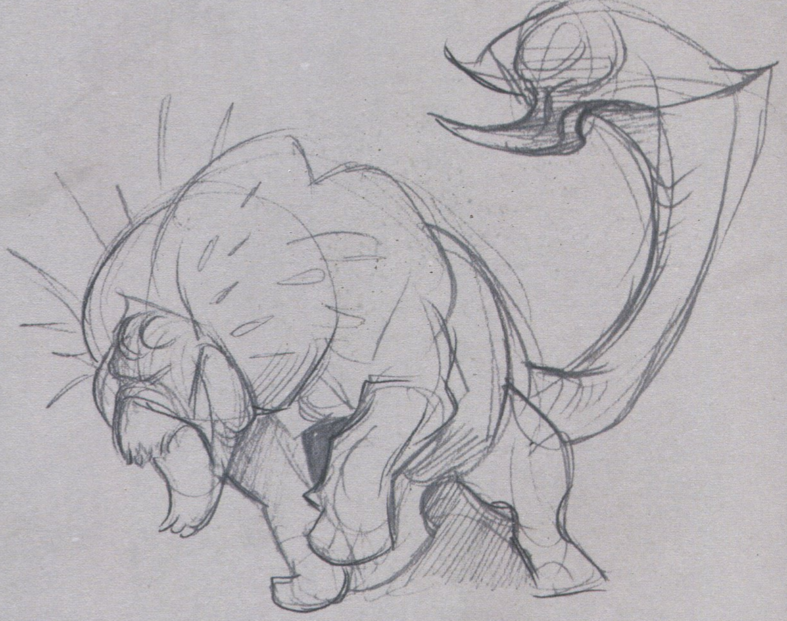


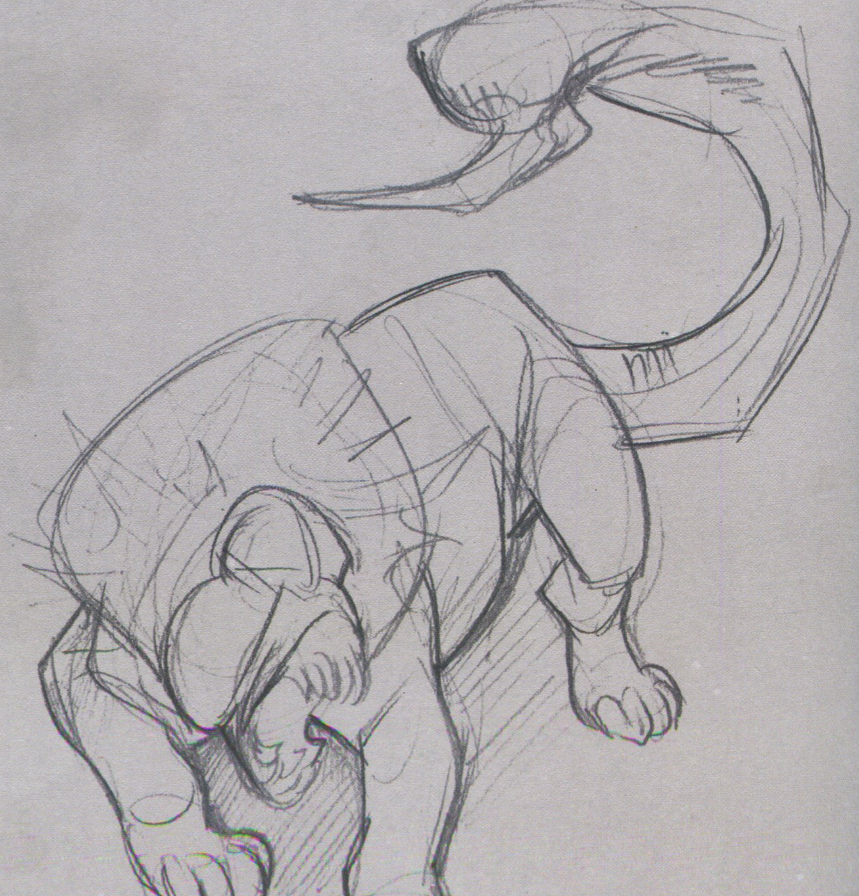


Poses

When it comes to beauty shots for a creature or character, it is good to use something that shows off the design while still being more dynamic than an orthographic view. I usually rough out poses like these in simple geometric shapes draped along a line of action, with at least the face visible in a three-quarter view. The first pose here features an S-shaped line of action. The creature's back is arched and looming to emphasize its size and oppressive presence, with the tail hooked over the back and angled menacingly at the viewer.

The second sketch is another S-pose variation, this time descended down the page as if the creature is approaching from high ground. Like the first it might be showing too little of the flank, but the tail is mostly in profile, allowing for good read of detail there. It might also be difficult to read the full mass of the neck from this angle. There is a balance to be obtained between action and readability in images like this. Currently, both of these are decently dynamic, but I might proceed with something that hides less of the total body.





• SUBSPECIES •

Armored manticore

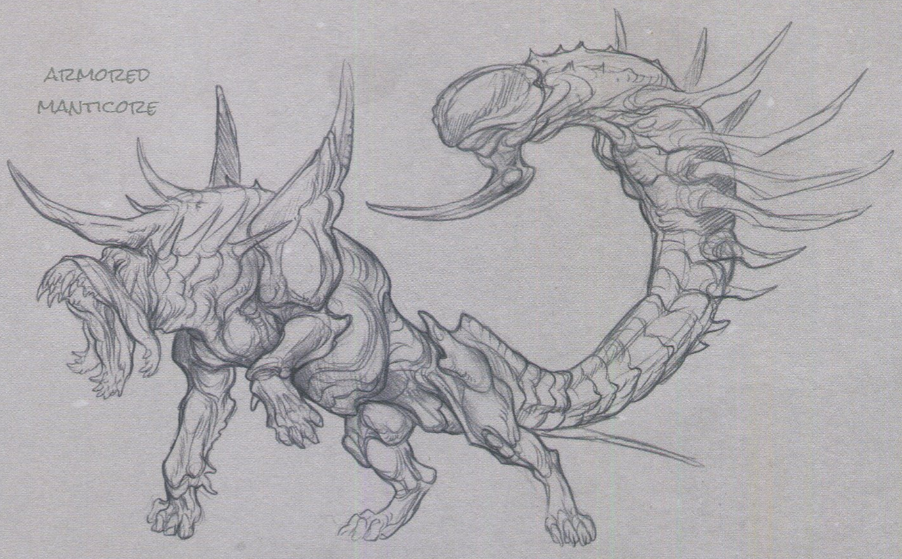
The armored manticore is the most insect-like of the manticore family. While the dentition of most manticore simply comes down to having three rows of teeth within the gums, this manticore has a split lower mandible (jawbone). It is the most heavily armored and most obviously segmented manticore. The same spines from the tail are repeated throughout the body and jut forward off the head to give the creature a threatening silhouette.

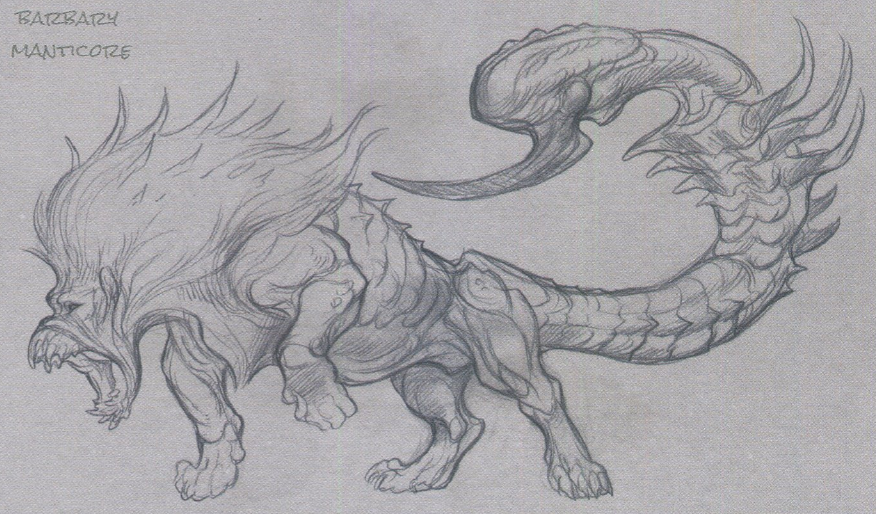
Barbary manticore

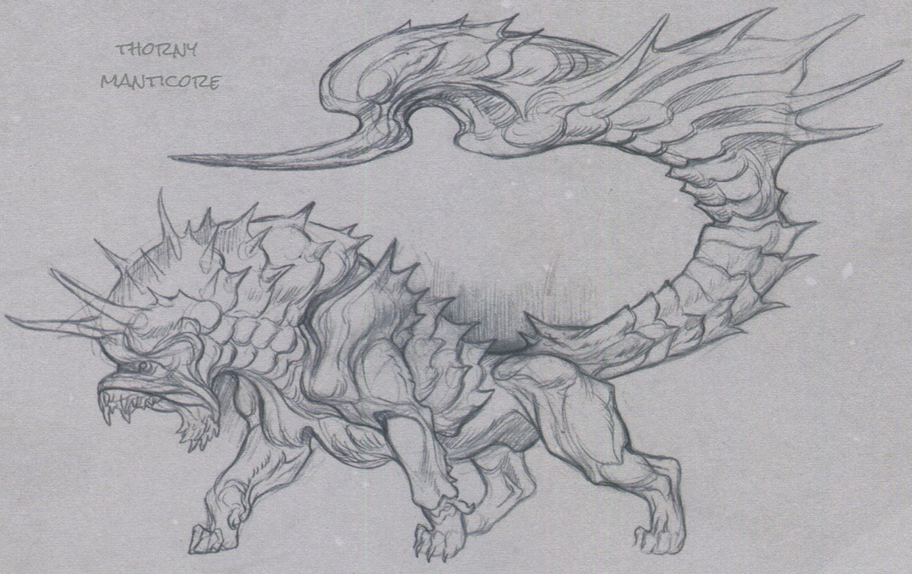
The Barbary manticore is more strictly mammalian than its cousins and is named after the extinct Barbary lion. The invertebrate features basically disappear at the neck with the exception of spines implanted in a furry mane. Like other manticores its back is arched and jaw stretched wide, with the skin of the upper lips peeled back over the maw. Neither the Barbary nor the armored manticore can close their mouths perfectly, much in the same way that sharks can't really close their mouths properly either.

Thorny manticore

The thorny manticore reflects a more even mix of invertebrate and vertebrate heritage. The mane is mostly replaced with segmented caterpillar-esque mounds of muscle and spikes, making it one of the most terrifying of the species. The protruding forehead sticking out from under the horns is reminiscent of a gorilla. There is a hint of something like the enlarged cheek pads of a male orangutan on the sides of the face, although this has not been confirmed by researchers. The tail incorporates the spines of other manticore subspecies into a half-circle hood, a bit like a cobra.



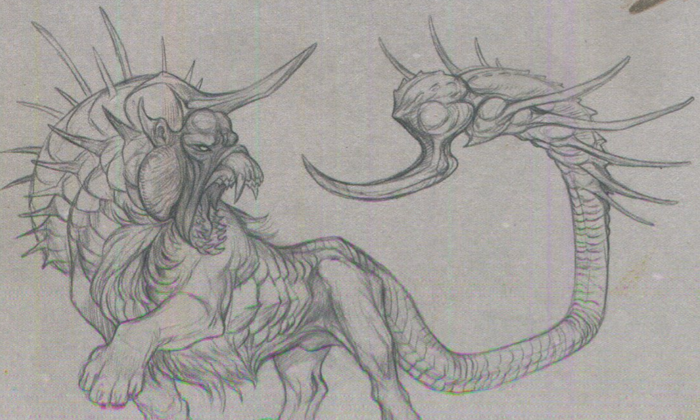


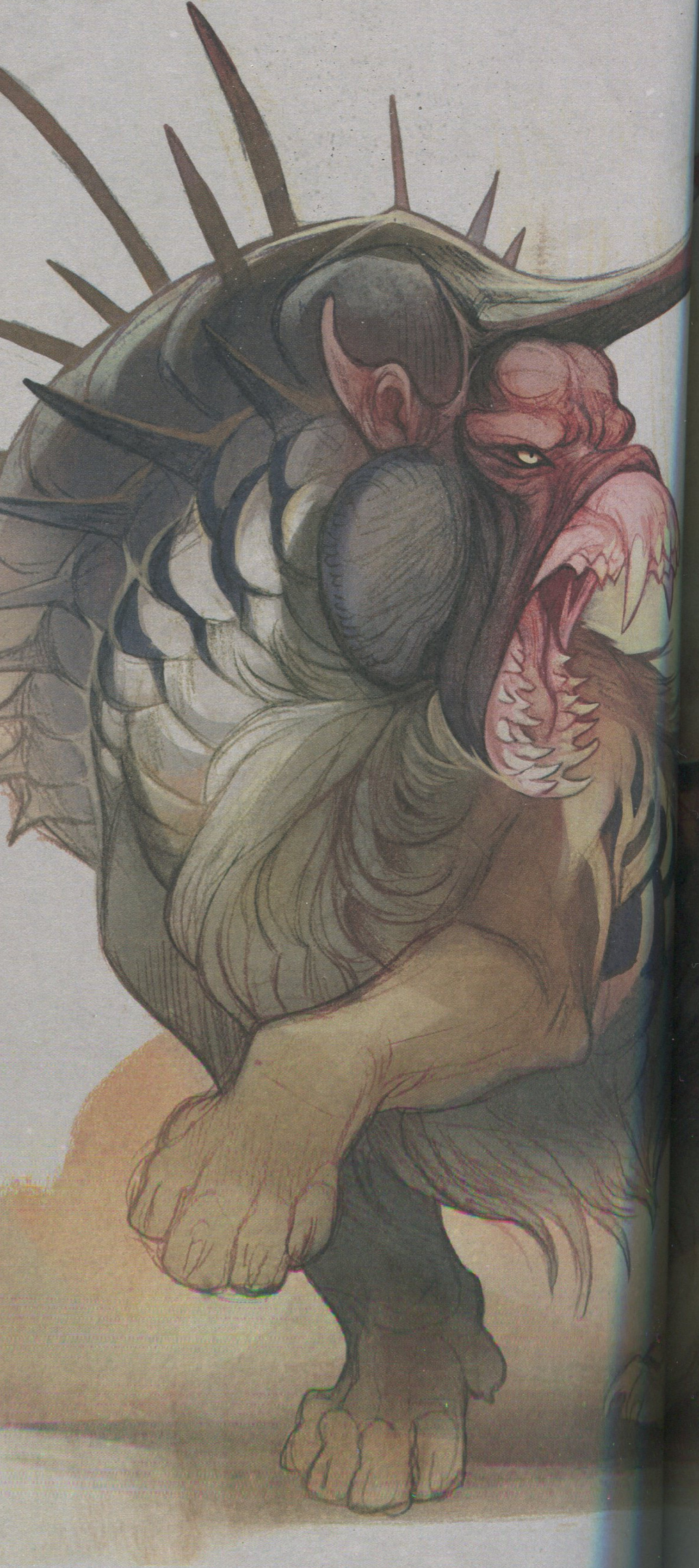


• FINAL DESIGN •

For the final image I toned the pose down slightly and reverted to more of a profile view with the head and neck at a three-quarter angle to better display the design. The head comes forward and the body descends slightly back into space, giving prominence to the creature's upper body.

I colored the manticore with sandy hues befitting that of a Persian desert creature, reserving the highest saturation for the important facial features. I kept the stinger dark so as not to compete too much with the head. The warm skin tones and primate features hint at the original human-headed version of the beast, while the stripes along the scales are a nod to its tiger origins. It has been peppered with the fabled projectile spines, and its mouth has more teeth than it knows what to do with.

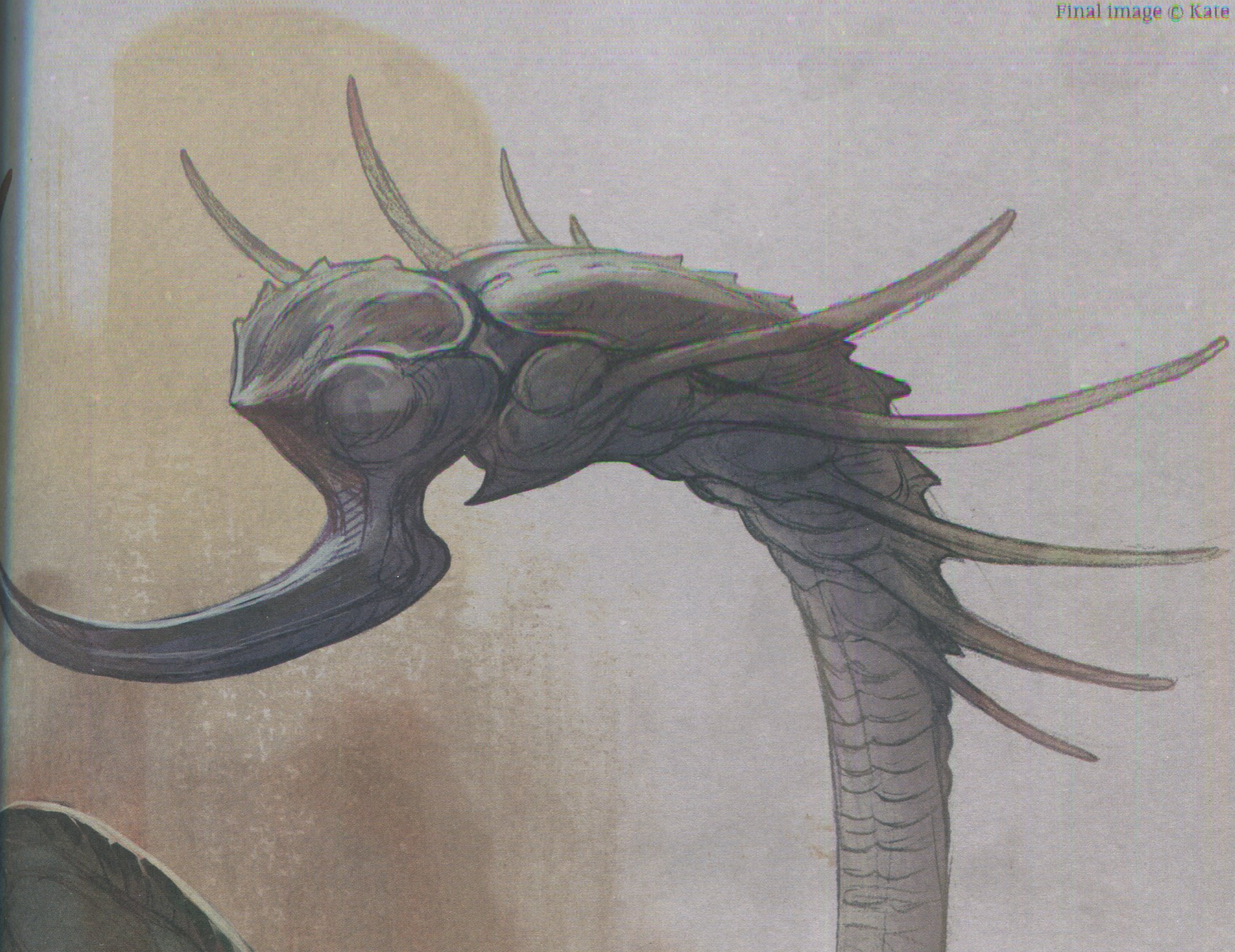


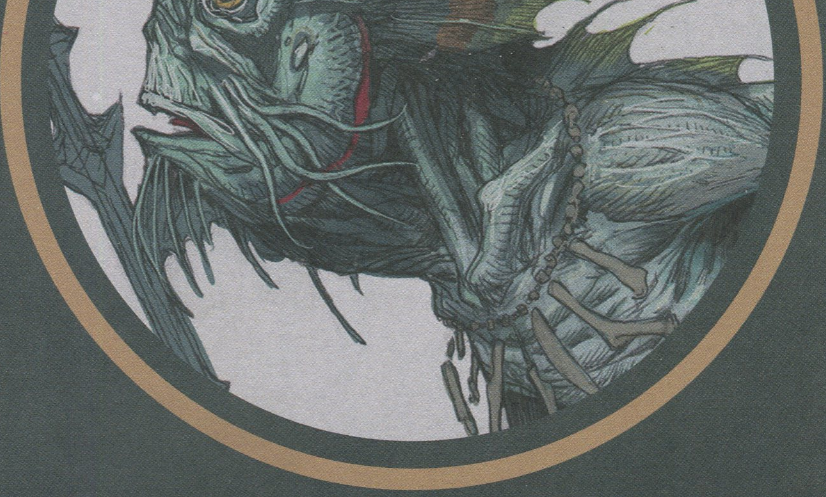


Key facts

Name: Manticore
Taxonomy: Lion, human, scorpion
Region: Persia
Habitat: Desert
Mythical abilities: Venomous stinger
Threat to humans: 5

Final image © Kate Pfeilschiefter





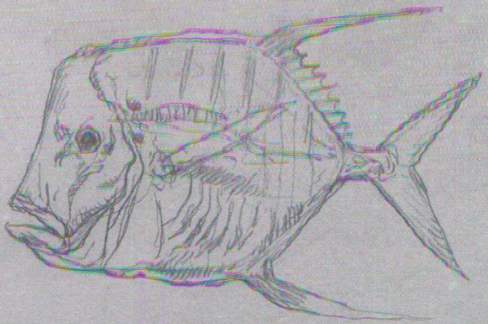
• MERMAN •

The merman is traditionally depicted as a half-man, half-fish creature, with the upper body of a man and the lower half of a fish. Although more modern renditions of mermen depict them as being as handsome as mermaids are beautiful, many traditional strands of folklore actually describe them as being quite hideous. With mermen found all over the world, reports vary as to whether they are friendly beings or more likely to bring harm to ships and their sailors. Generally understood to be wise, they have been known to cause storms, cure illness, sink ships, remove curses, and seduce women.

• SEAN ANDREW MURRAY •

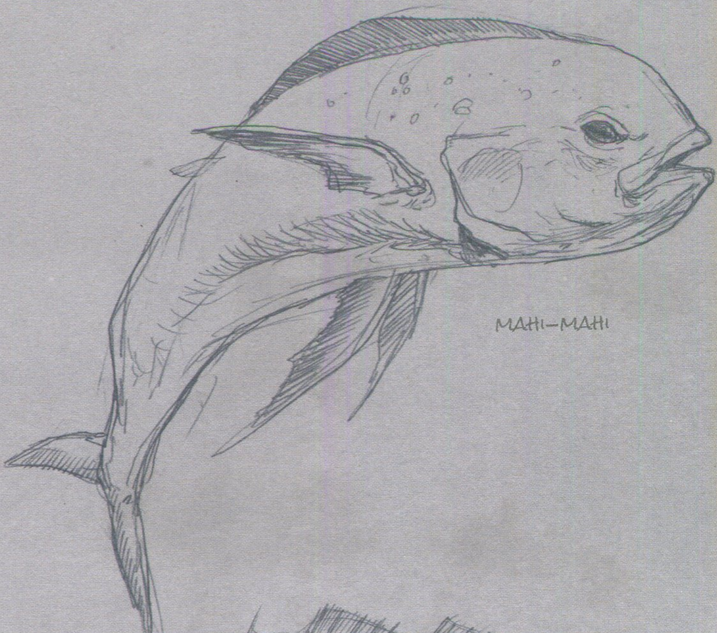
Illustrator & concept artist • seanandrewmurray.com

• FIELD NOTES •


LOOKDOWN

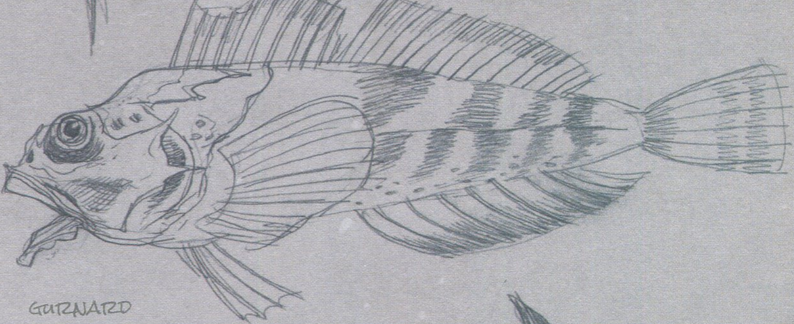
Fish facial features

Fish come in so many shapes, sizes, and variants it can be hard to know which ones to be inspired by! It will be important to capture those classic fish lips and the lidless, staring eyes in the merman design. To do this, I look at and draw real-life oceanic fish, searching for common elements. The lookdown and the mahi-mahi (or dolphinfish, not to be confused with the mammal dolphin) offer some great examples of fish faces.


MAHI–MAHI

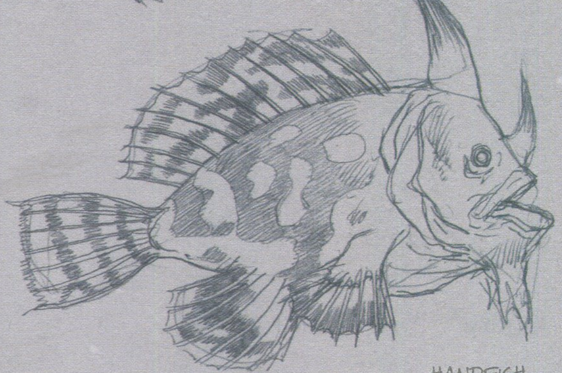
Fish tails

Both of these fish have very simple Y-shaped tails. To reinforce the idea that the merman is more *mer* than *man*, I want to give the design a standard fish tail that bends side-to-side, rather than front-to-back like mammals. This will affect his movement anatomically; with a sideways-bending spine his swimming action will look more like a fish than a mammal such as a whale or porpoise.


GURNARD

Fish decoration

Unlike the lookdown and mahi-mahi, the bottom two fish shown here are more overstated with their patterning and fin structures. They are likely slower moving and live either in reefs or along the bottom of the sea floor. This may be an interesting source of inspiration to help explore more dynamic silhouettes for the merman's "plumage." The tiger patterning or dots and splotches would create unique opportunities for individualization among the merman population. I also like the spikes and spines that these types of fish display.


HANDFISH

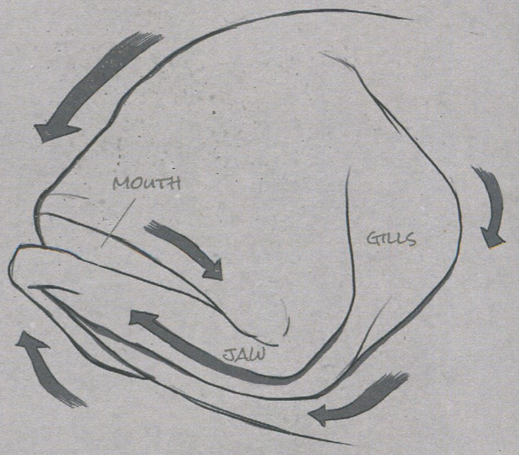
Fish limbs

The handfish presents an interesting intersection between reality and myth since it actually has a set of "legs" that it sometimes uses to move itself along the sea floor. It is fun to think that this fish could perhaps be the early ancestor of the mermen. Studying these kinds of features and thinking about how creatures evolve can present ideas for how to design a mythical being, for example how to construct the merman's more human-like limbs without them simply looking like a pair of human arms stuck onto a fish. If you live near an aquarium, take your sketchbook there and draw as many fish as you can!

Fish head

When preparing to draw a fish-like face, it is important to understand how the gills, jaw, and lips work as a unit. The gills are essentially a fish's lungs. Water comes in through the mouth and passes through the gills, which are behind the mouth opening and on either side of its head. The water passes over radiator-like membranes that filter oxygen out of the water and into the blood stream. Carbon dioxide is then expelled through the water out of the gills at the back of the head.

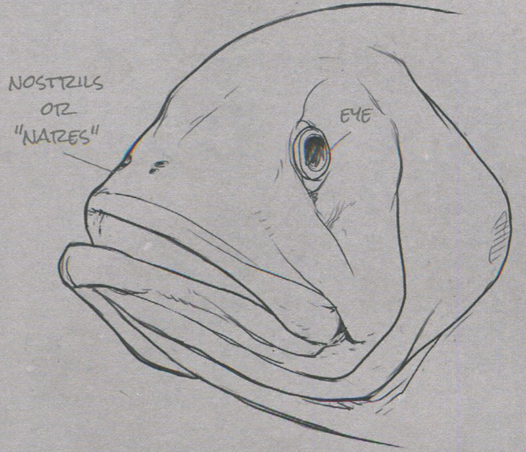
CONNECTING THE LINE OF GILLS TO THE BOTTOM JAW



The jaw is interconnected with the gills. The bones of the jaw hinge below where the lips come together, and then connect to bony structures that sweep back and up to form the "head" structure of the fish. This creates the line of the gills, which then arches back towards the front of the head after reaching a point somewhere close to the lateral line of the fish. Each fish is slightly different, and these elements all have subtle variations, but the overall structure is basically the same in most fish.

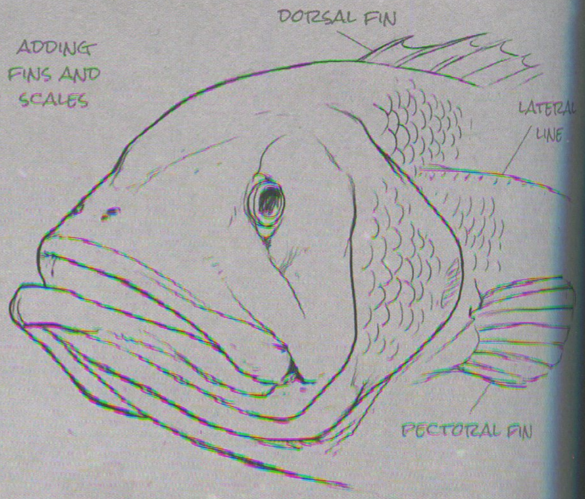
When drawing this, I make sure the line of the gills connects to the bottom of the jaw. The lines from the gills on either side come up to a point just underneath the front of the lower jaw. This creates that appearance of the jutting lower jaw, which also gives most of these perciformes ("perch-like") fish their up-turned look.

POSITIONING THE EYE



Once the basic form is established, I place the eye, which is always in front of the gill flaps and rests in that zone between the mouth and the top of the head. The eye can sometimes be all the way at the very top of the "nose" ridge. When it comes to the nose, fish do have nostrils, but they are not for breathing (that's what the gills are for) but rather just for "smelling." These nostrils are actually called "nares" and have two openings for each nare – one for bringing water into the nare, and one for expelling it. As water passes through the nares they pass over olfactory sensory cells that connect to the brain. So, from now on, when you draw fish nostrils you will know that they each have two openings! A subtle detail, for sure, but it is these kinds of things that can really add a sense of realism and authenticity to your designs.

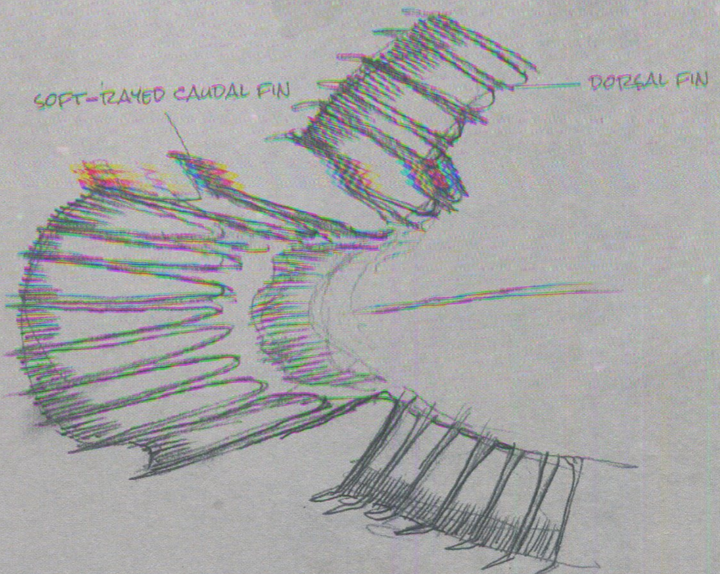
ADDING FINS AND SCALES



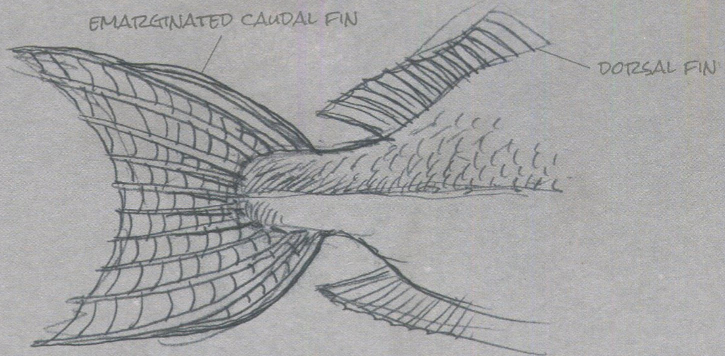
As I finish the head anatomy I think about some of the other elements that begin just after the head ends (and for this design's purpose, some of the elements will be incorporated into the merman's head "plumage"). The dorsal fin (or fins) start just above the top of the gill flap on top of the head and extend back down along the back. This mohawk-like structure is usually fairly "spiny." The pectoral fin, which is sort of akin to a fish's "hand" and helps with steering, starts just behind the outer gill flap and below the "lateral line," which is a line of important sensory organs that runs along the length of the fish down to the base of its tail. Having this lateral line represented in some way in the merman design will enhance that sense of "fishiness."

Fish tail

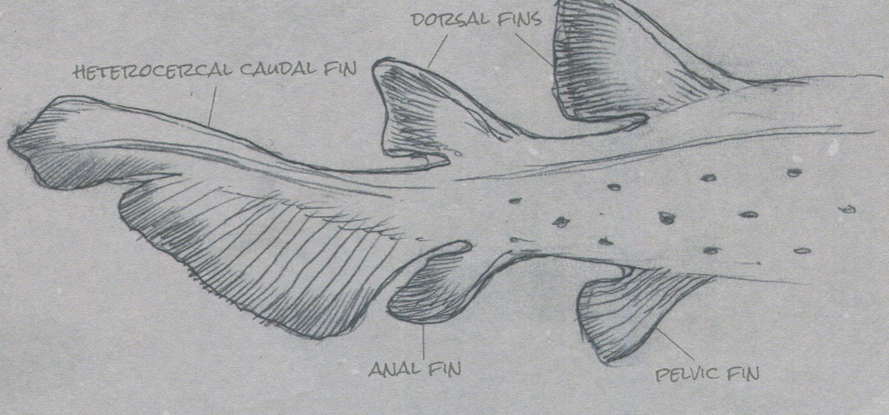
There are a lot of different kinds of fish fins with varying shapes, sizes, and patterns. For the merman I consider using a fairly classic tail typical of perciformes fish, like the ones I have been studying. These fish have what are called "caudal" (tail) fins, which are typically symmetrical, or homocercal (as opposed to heterocercal caudal fins, which are not symmetrical and are found in some sharks, and which I will experiment with later). The first one shown here is called a rounded caudal fin and is "soft-rayed," meaning it has the look of being more flexible like a goldfish tail. Other types of homocercal caudal fins include pointed, forked, lunate (which look like half-moons, like a tuna tail), truncate (squared), and indented or emarginated.



The next study shows an emarginated or indented caudal fin that is spiny, meaning it has a more rigid set of spines. In all of these, notice the lateral lines that I have indicated on the fish's body. In both this fish tail on the right and the one above you will see that the lateral line extends directly into the middle of the tail, and marks the line of symmetry for the tail fin.



The more shark-like tail shown at the bottom of this page is "heterocercal," or asymmetrical, which means that the spine extends into the structure of the upper part of the tail, making it longer. This may be an interesting element to experiment with for the merman. I take note of the unique structure of the dorsal and anal fins as they seem to have more of a base structure that extends up beyond the body before splaying out into the rays compared to other fish whose fin rays seem to jut right out of the body. I will play around with these elements for the merman. I try not to feel bound too much by what I research and learn about fish anatomy; this is the fun part – learning something new and then deciding what elements to incorporate and which ones not to.



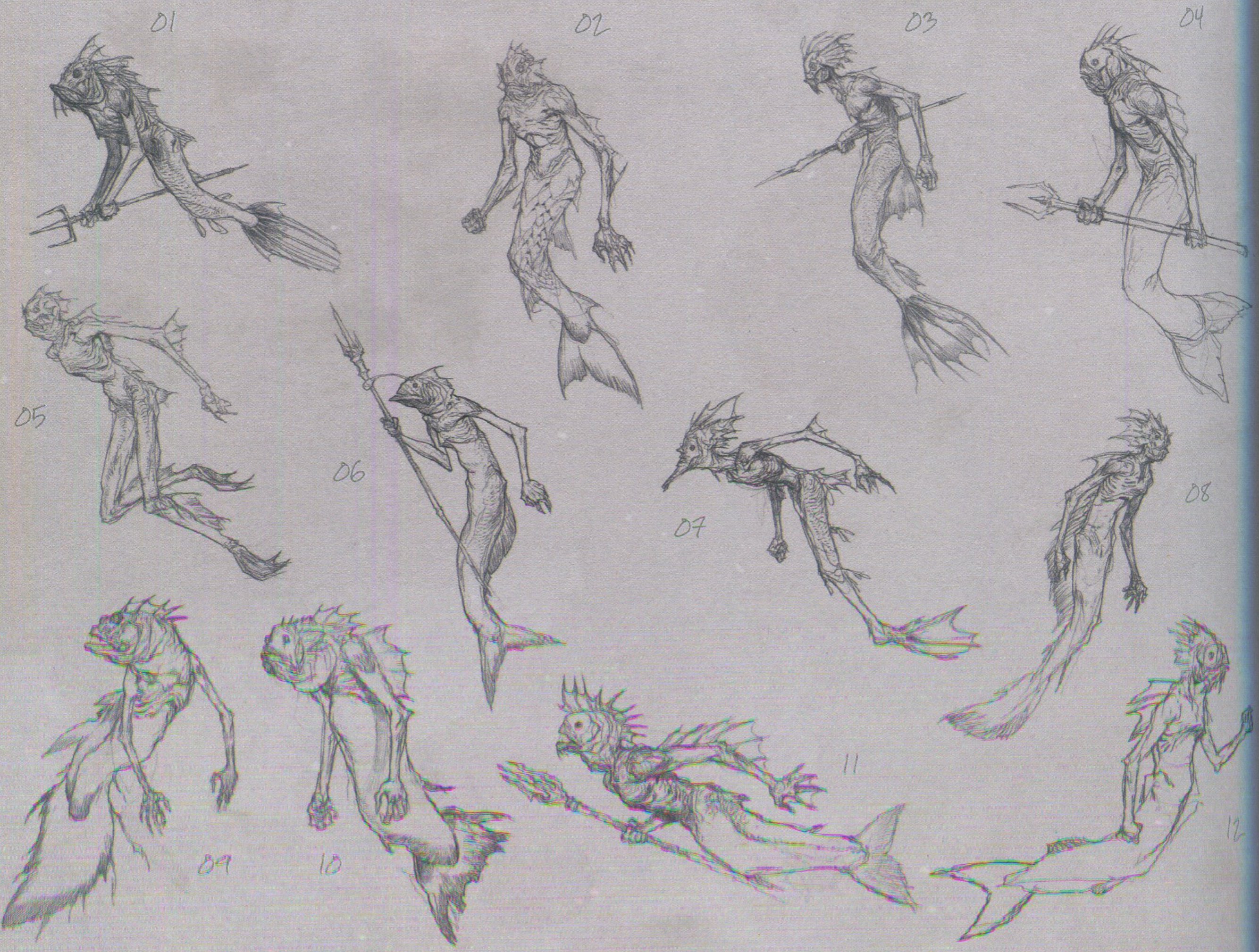
• DESIGN PROCESS •

Thumbnails

Many mythical creatures bear descriptions that suggest that the observers chose to explain the creatures in familiar terms: a bunyip is part crocodile, part dog, part walrus, or a cockatrice is part snake, part rooster. Chances are that if something existed that made sailors describe that creature as half-man, half-fish, the truth would have probably been that it was something more like a fish with human-like limbs and a more expressive, yet still quite fishy, head and mouth. This is the approach I want to take for the merman.

Thumbnailing is the time to take the research and experiments and start putting them to the test. One area I think separates those fishier designs from the more human-like designs is in how the head and neck are constructed. Should the merman have a head that flows into the structure of the body with no neck, like a real fish, or should the head be separated from the body by a more human-like neck structure? I experimented with both approaches in these thumbnails, and also tried to blur the line in between for a few of them. I also started to think about whether the merman would have any sort of accoutrement, such as a staff or trident.

I played around with some of the facial elements, for example by extending the nose line to be longer or more severe and by moving the eyes higher up. Experimenting like this allowed me to develop a unique fish face that I could use for the final merman design. Thumbnails 01 and 03 work well as the large lower jaw, elongated dorsal fin, and spines beneath the mouth make it look particularly ugly and almost aggressive when coupled with the trident. I also like the designs that have a bony and prominent ribcage as it adds to the unattractive, disproportionate look. The tail is one of the hardest things to choose, although I think a spiny one would enhance the unpleasant and unearthly appearance suited to the myth.



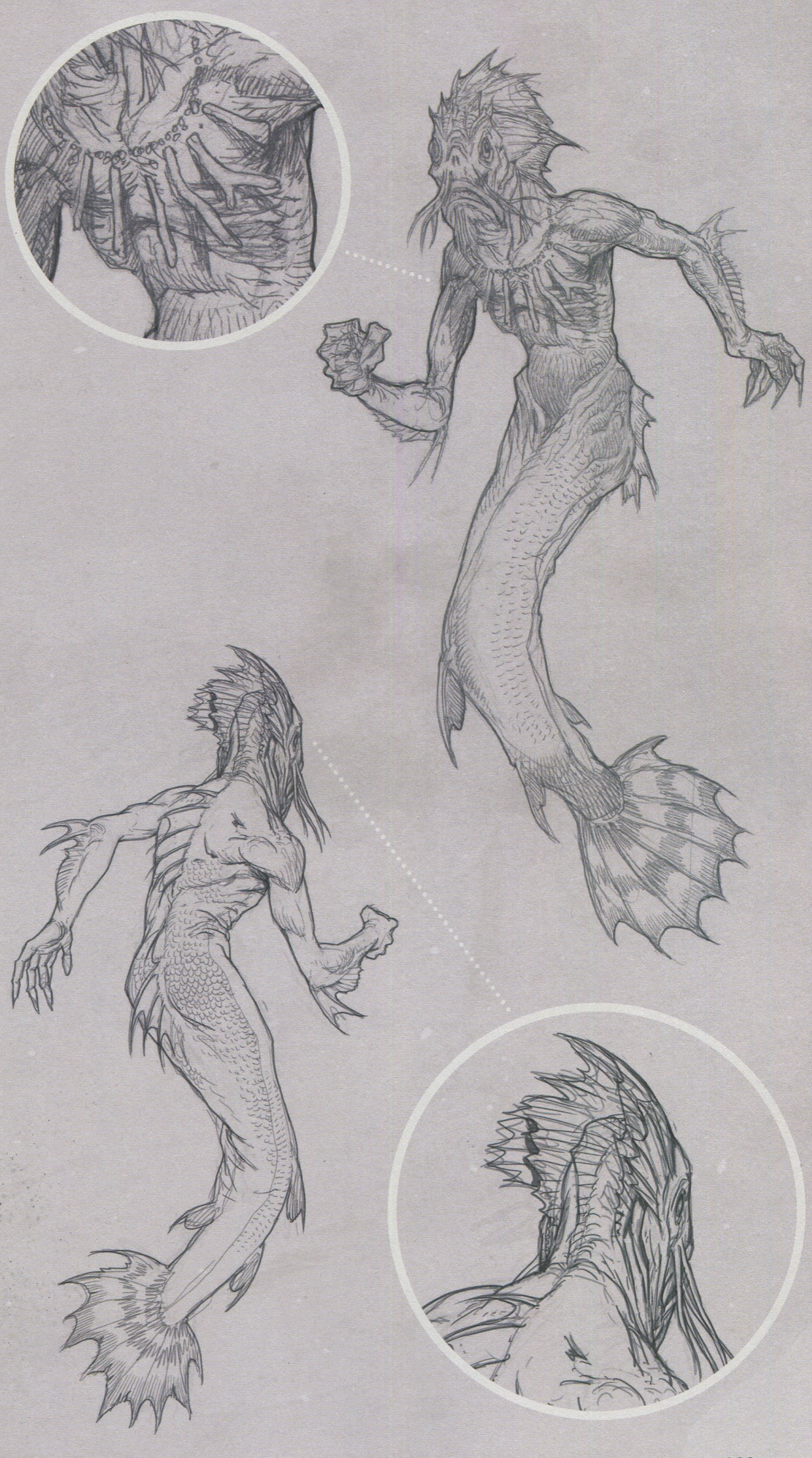
Further exploration

I chose to move forward with the sketches shown here. This merman has a cross between a human and fish neck structure, but has more of a human upper torso. One point I noted in the thumbnailing process was that some of the designs felt too much like a fish with arms. Since the merman is a fantasy creature, I wanted to return to the idea of this being a magical cross between a man and a fish. While grounding creature design in reality is useful, being too "biological" sometimes runs the risk of making the concept feel less magical or mysterious. It depends on the approach you want: are you designing a creature that looks like it could have reasonably existed, or something that evokes a sense of a world that follows its own rules?

Creating drawings of the creature in different views and poses helps to test out what I imagined the overall structure to be. It presents problems (such as how to incorporate a more human upper torso into a fish torso) and helps develop solutions (maybe the upper part of the leg structure could look like fused-together human legs, then transition at the "knees" into a more fish-like tail structure).

From the front you can see the ugly, down-turned mouth of the merman, with whiskers that appear almost like a beard, which is a common element in many merman stories. The fins on the lower arms help reconcile the human torso with the fish design. Repeating shape language in the undulating and pointy spines is echoed in the hands as well, helping to bring coherency to the whole concept.

From behind you can see the dorsal fin extending down along the human back and onto the fish tail, which again helps to unite the two themes of the merman. The rear view also provides information about how the fin-like crest forms around the back of his head. Note the lateral line and caudal fin carried over from the research.



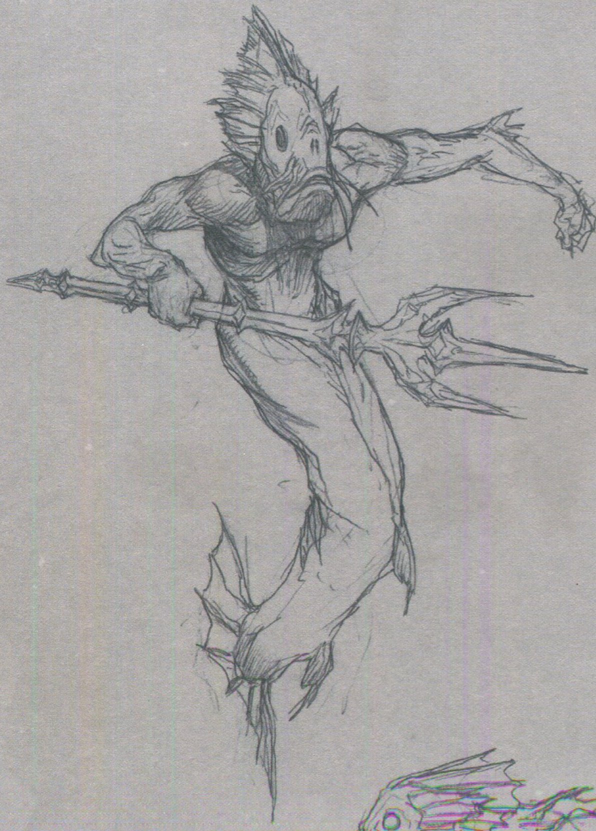
Poses

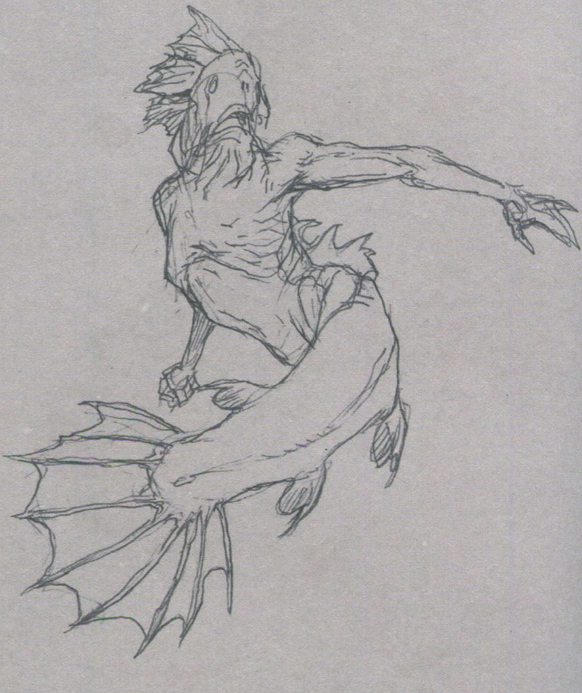
Once I had decided on the design, I needed to start visualizing how the merman moves. This is important for understanding the creature design and making sure that it works. When experimenting with pose drawings it is important to both stretch the character out and scrunch him up in order to make sure the design offers a full range of movement, and does not present serious issues such as spikes or fins that do not allow for a full range of motion. This concept was ingrained into me in my video game concept art days, when my designs had to be tested in simple, animated forms to check for these kinds of problems.

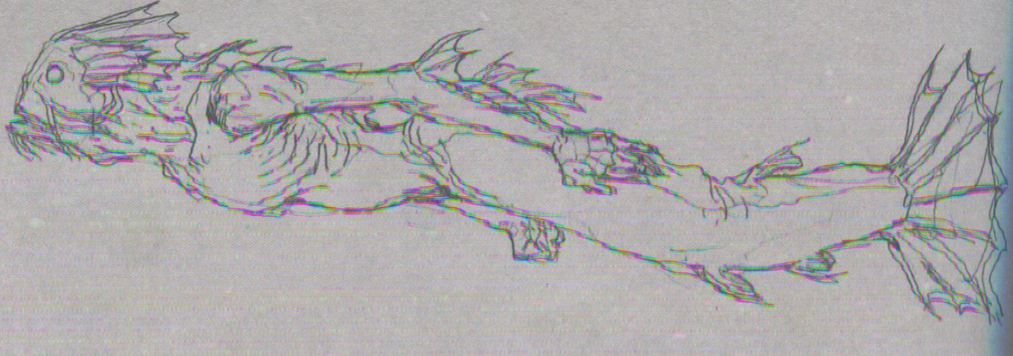
The first pose shows the merman holding the trident as if he is about to strike something with it. This allowed me to work further on the arm muscles and how the merman might hold his head in a posed position. The upright pose gives him a more humanoid appearance.

The second pose provided an opportunity to work out how the merman's body would twist around, which is useful for thinking about how the caudal tail would work. It looks as though the merman is swimming away from something, only to have its attention called back, perhaps to an unsavory human interfering in its environment.

The final pose shows the merman swimming; you can see how streamlined his body can become, which makes him appear much more fish-like on the upper body, especially compared to the previous two poses.







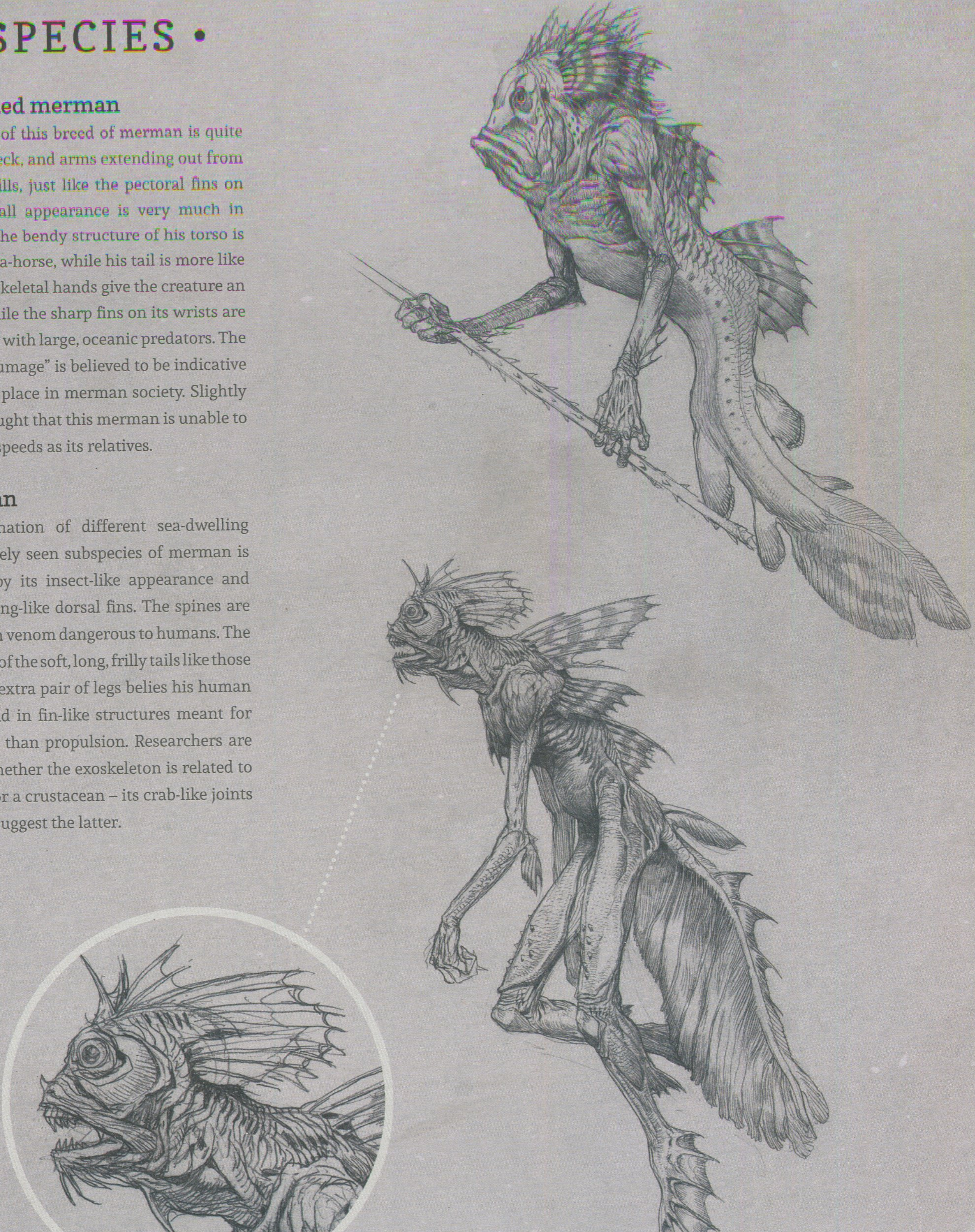
• SUBSPECIES •

Bulbous-headed merman

The head and face of this breed of merman is quite distinct. With no neck, and arms extending out from right behind the gills, just like the pectoral fins on real fish, the overall appearance is very much in the fish category. The bendy structure of his torso is reminiscent of a sea-horse, while his tail is more like that of shark. The skeletal hands give the creature an unearthly look, while the sharp fins on its wrists are often used in fights with large, oceanic predators. The elaborate head "plumage" is believed to be indicative of the individual's place in merman society. Slightly top-heavy, it is thought that this merman is unable to swim at the same speeds as its relatives.

Wasp merman

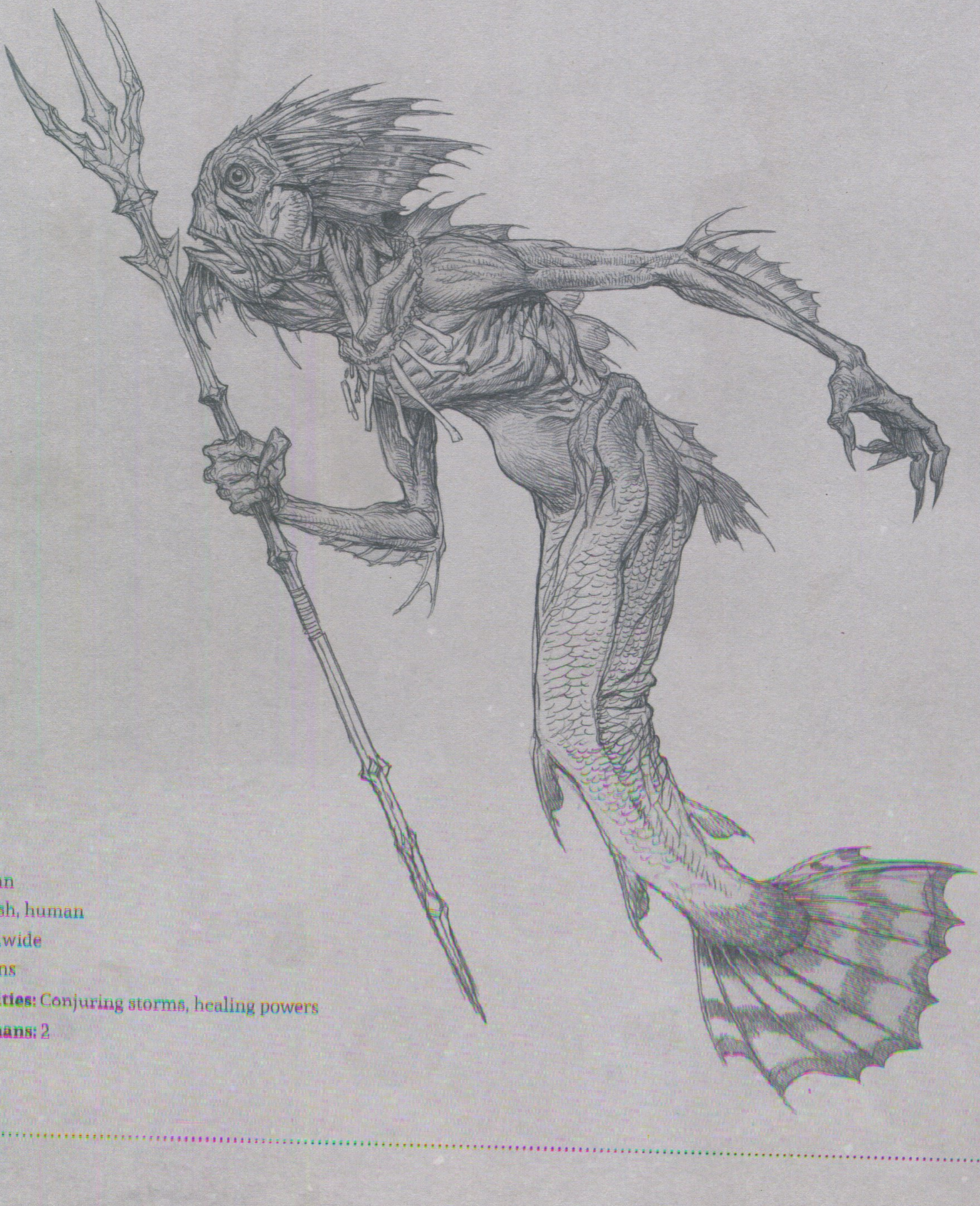
A bizarre combination of different sea-dwelling creatures, this rarely seen subspecies of merman is easily identified by its insect-like appearance and striped, almost wing-like dorsal fins. The spines are believed to contain venom dangerous to humans. The tail is reminiscent of the soft, long, frilly tails like those of a goldfish. The extra pair of legs belies his human heritage; these end in fin-like structures meant for navigation rather than propulsion. Researchers are yet to agree on whether the exoskeleton is related to that of an insect or a crustacean – its crab-like joints around the knee suggest the latter.



• FINAL DESIGN •

The final design reflects the ugly nature of the merman as indicated in certain folklore, and brings together both fish and human elements in a cohesive way. In the color version you can observe the patterning in the fins, which adds interest and could be useful in terms of camouflage. While a trident may be a fairly cliché prop in this context, sometimes the traditional elements work the best.

Note the emphasis of the lateral line, which accentuates that non-mammalian nature of the creature. Similarly you can see how the research provided the foundations for the glassy eye, scales, and different types of fins, clearly portraying the fish-like qualities of the beast. At the same time, the decorative element of the necklace suggests that mermen are intelligent beings – they produce art, express themselves, and have sentimentality. This makes it possible for a viewer to relate to mermen more and changes the nature of how we might perceive them. When you take the time to insert world-building into your designs, you increase the likelihood that you will create something memorable and engaging.



Key facts

Name: Merman

Taxonomy: Fish, human

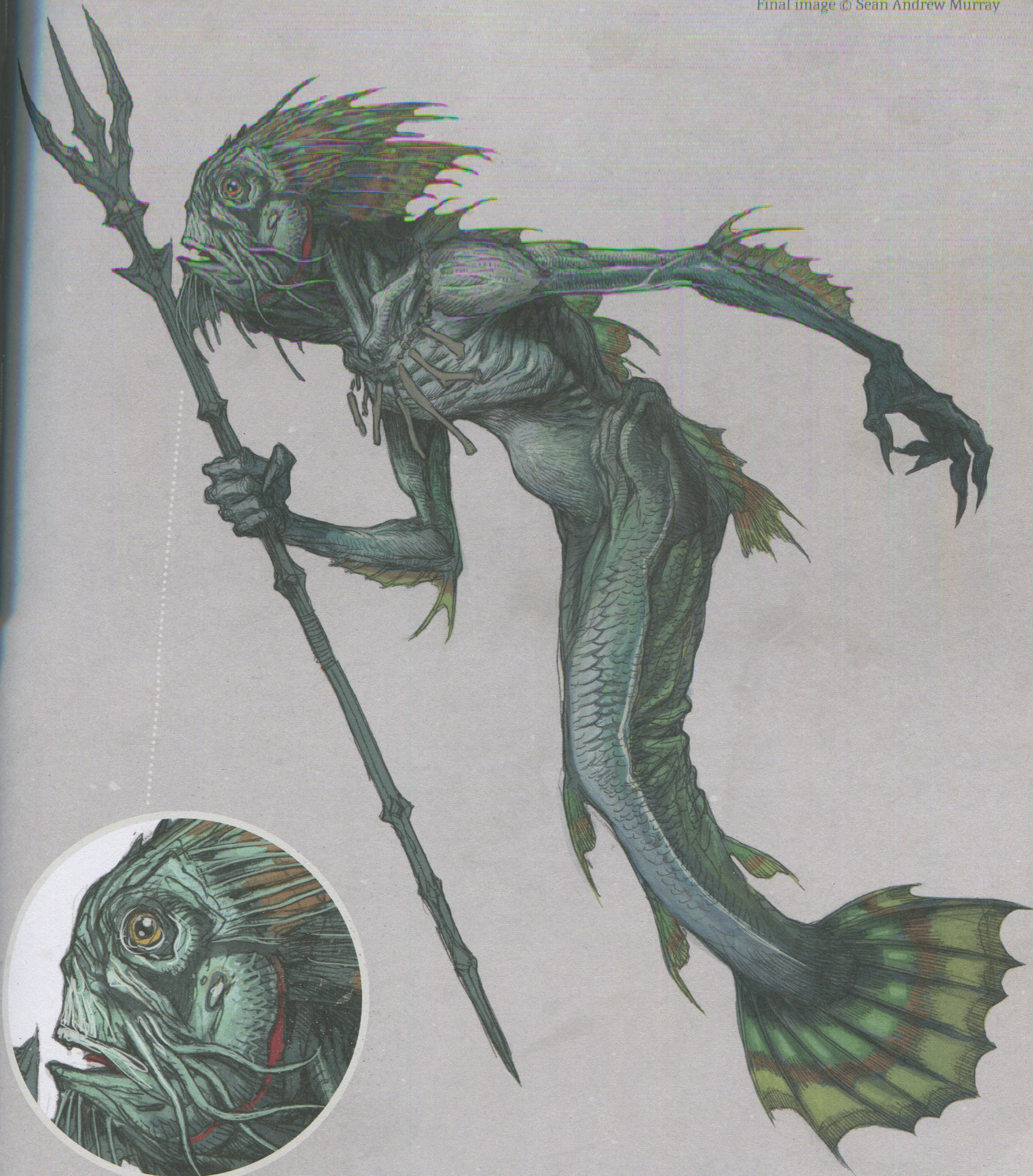
Region: Worldwide

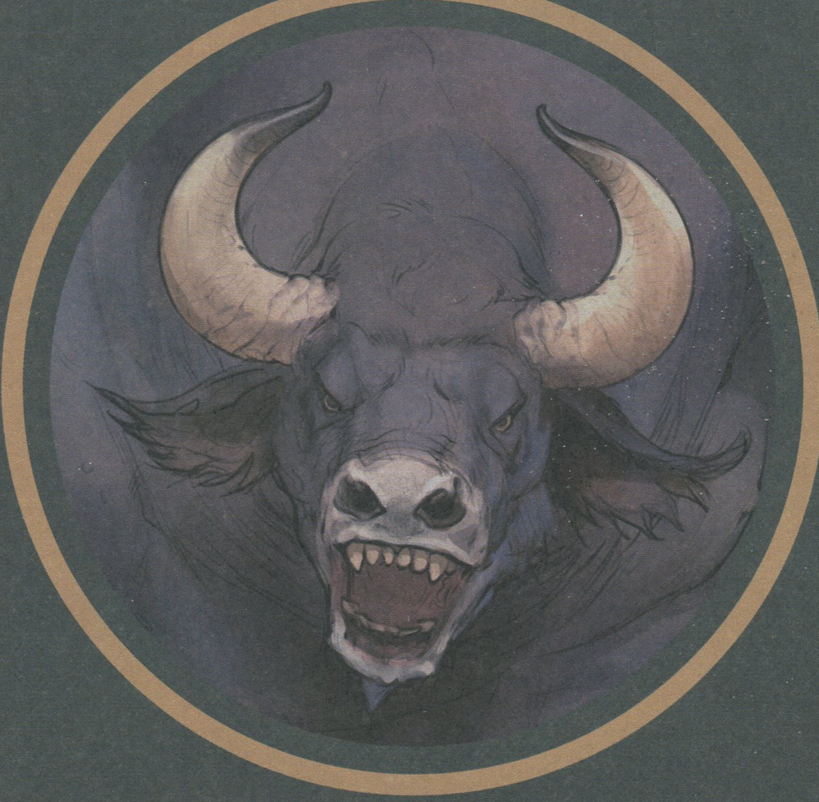
Habitat: Oceans

Mythical abilities: Conjuring storms, healing powers

Threat to humans: 2

Final image © Sean Andrew Murray





• MINOTAUR •

The Minotaur is a powerful and dangerous creature from Greek mythology who is half-bull and half-man. Accounts and interpretations exist that vary in that combination. Some describe solely the head of a bull on a man's body, which is more faithful to the original classical description, while more modern depictions are heavily furred and bull-like with a bovine head, shoulders, and hind legs, with just the torso and arms of a human. The one thing reports have in common, however, is the ferocity of the Minotaur. The offspring of a white bull and Pasiphaë, the queen of Crete, the original Minotaur lived at the center of an intricate labyrinth near Knossos on the island of Crete and devoured any who entered his lair, including the Athenians sacrificed to him each year.

• LUKE MANCINI •

Concept artist · instagram.com/misterjackart

• FIELD NOTES •

Bulls

I start by studying a standard bull. I want to work out how the general proportions feel and how the face is structured. Of particular interest are the muscle groups around the eyebrow, jaw, and nose, as these can be emphasized and adjusted when using the base shape for a more fantastical creature. The structure of the horns and where they attach to the head are also very important when comparing the skull of a bull to that of other horned animals. I want to make sure I keep the head of the Minotaur distinct from a faun (see page 114) or satyr, for example.

Cape buffaloes

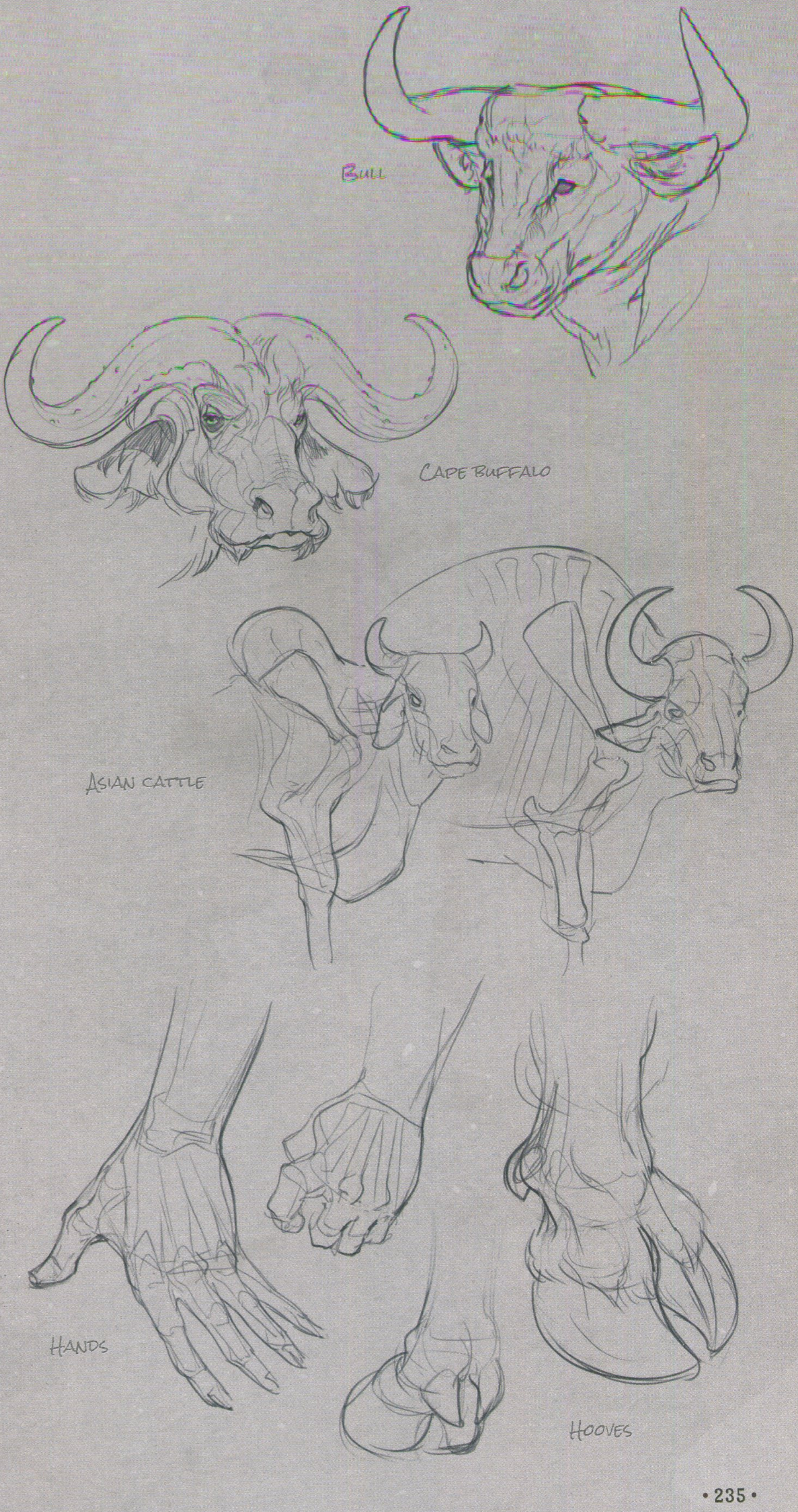
I then move further afield, looking at the head of a Cape buffalo. Their countenance is generally a lot more menacing and grumpier. They also provide some extra interesting details to potentially draw from, such as the longer, more matted hair, wider mouth, and details across the horns. These elements give individuality and can easily be exaggerated for a mythological feel.

Asian cattle

Moving on from the buffalo, I take a look at some other cattle breeds, specifically focusing on the head and forequarters that will be used for the Minotaur. I am very interested in some of the Asian breeds that have excessively large shoulder and back muscles, such as the zebu, which I could leverage to create a very heavy-set figure that conveys a lot of power.

Hands versus hooves

Finally I study some appendages that might be useful. I am still undecided on whether to use all human limbs or mix these with bovine back legs, so I take the opportunity to compare human and animal anatomy in order to consider how to mix the two creatures into one. The cloven hooves will give the beast a more demonic appearance, while the hands relate back to its human origins.

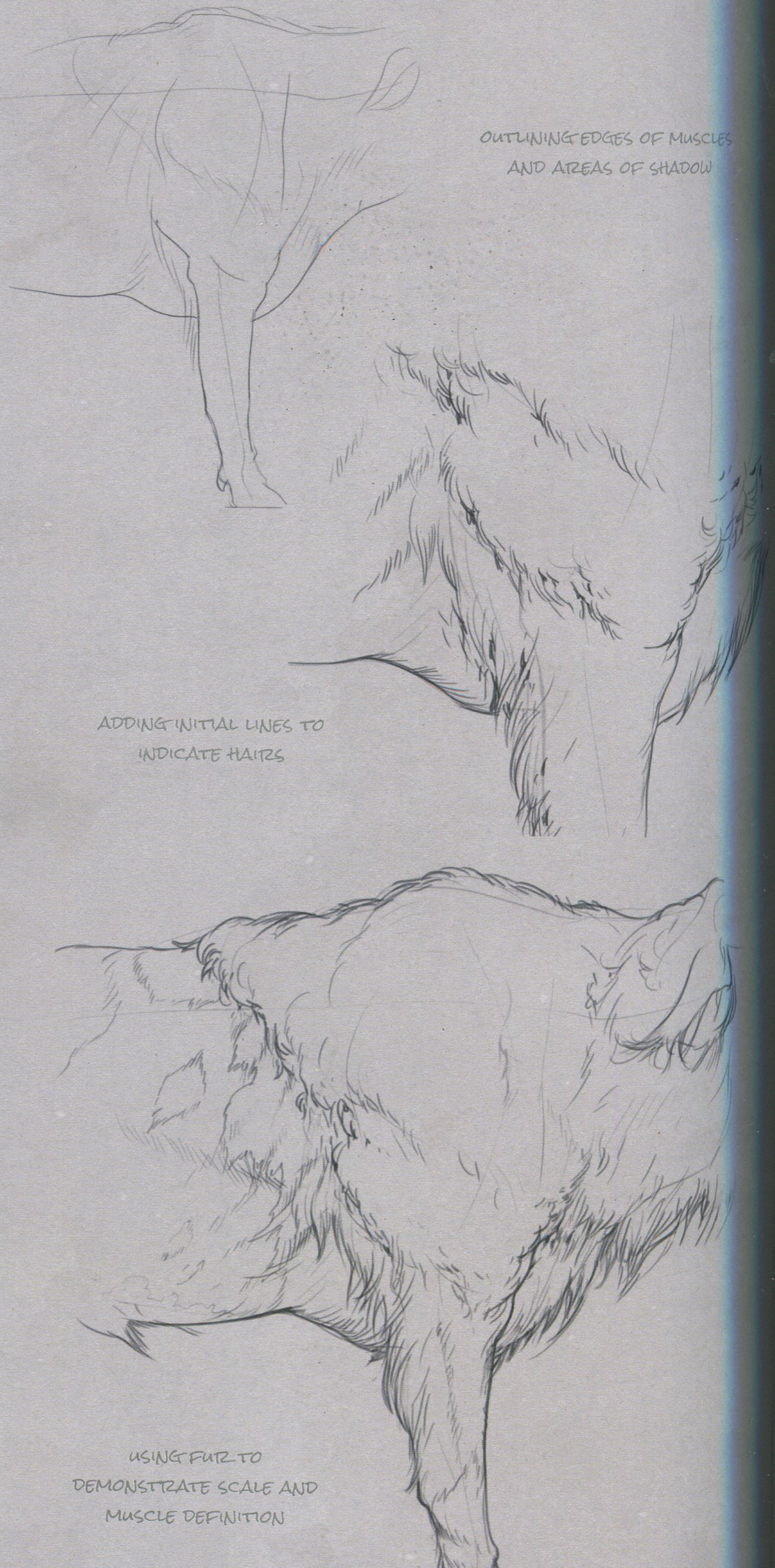


Bovine fur

When preparing for short fur, I begin with the shape of the creature, as outlining the base will help me to understand where the forms of the body will be even if those initial lines are eventually covered by the extended silhouette of the hair. For short-haired animals like cows, it is not necessary to actually draw that much hair, especially when not working on super close-ups, so knowing where to use hair to define the shapes of muscles will make the creature appear appropriately bristly and powerful. The main element to lay down in this initial stage is the direction of hair flow; usually it is a combination of gravity and following the form of the limb or muscle being drawn at the time. Lightly roughing in the edges of muscles and areas of shadow delineation helps me to know where to place the most detail when it comes to adding the majority of the fur.

To represent slightly curly hair, I start adding swooping shapes, working in the direction that I initially planned. These generally represent the shadowed sides of a mass of fur; filling in some spaces between the curls with black will give the impression of thicker fur, and playing around with the regularity and density of those shadows will allow me to control volume. Breaking the silhouette for hanging fur is a great way of adding scale (on a small animal the fur is not generally heavy enough to hang away from the body and is more likely to lay in the direction it is growing). Playing with the neatness can be a good way to add character: smooth, even fur is a sign of a clean or noble animal while irregular, messy, or longer fur will show wildness. When adding fur like that to the underside of a creature or to limbs, I keep in mind that the opposite side will be flatter – it is very rare that fur will stick up evenly in all directions.

Keeping all that in mind, there are many things I can do with linework to suggest the nature of the fur. Thicker curls around the edge of a mane are created by emphasizing the shadows around those edges on one side and fading the curls on the other. Defining muscles using broken lines and small hair marks is a great way of showing that a large creature has a covering of short, coarse hair, and is also a good way to demonstrate scale. Using a hairy edge around patterns like spots or patches is also a useful way to make an animal feel hairy without having to actually draw all of the fur.



OUTLINING EDGES OF MUSCLES AND AREAS OF SHADOW

ADDING INITIAL LINES TO INDICATE HAIRS

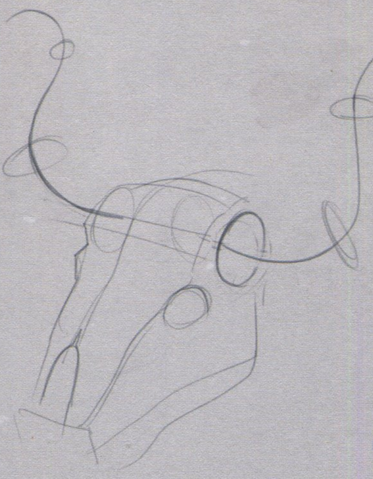
USING FUR TO DEMONSTRATE SCALE AND MUSCLE DEFINITION

Bull horns

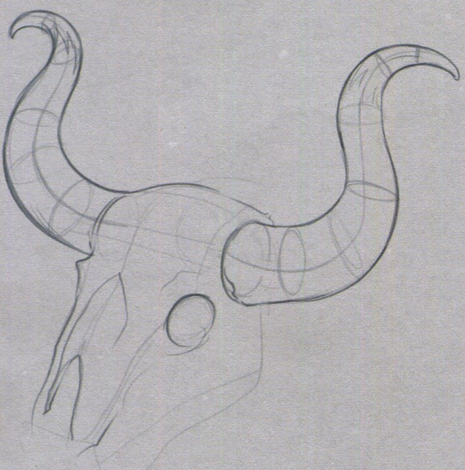
When adding horns to a creature it is very important to understand where they connect to the skull. I start by roughing in a circle for the base of each horn, and from the center of that I draw a line that follows the middle of the horn all the way to the tip. I then add further circles along the line – imagining, for example, bangles along a curving rope – to plan out how the horn will curve and narrow as it gets further from the head.

I add as many structural shapes as I need. The most important places for these are where the horn curves or bends, as this will make the most difference in the way the silhouette of the horn will look. Once the base is worked out, connecting up the outer edges will give you the shape of the horns, from a well-fitting base to a pleasing point.

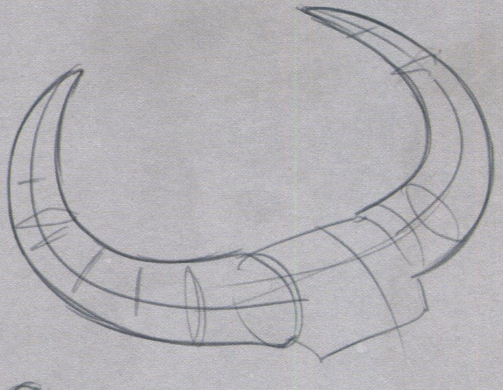
Generally, bull horns are roughly U-shaped, but using the above process will help you with any creature's horns – and in any position as well! Using different scaffolding (cross-section) shapes will allow you to experiment with more exotic types of horns. Once the structural drawing is erased, features like ridges running down the horn or knots and bumps can really help emphasize the twists and turns.



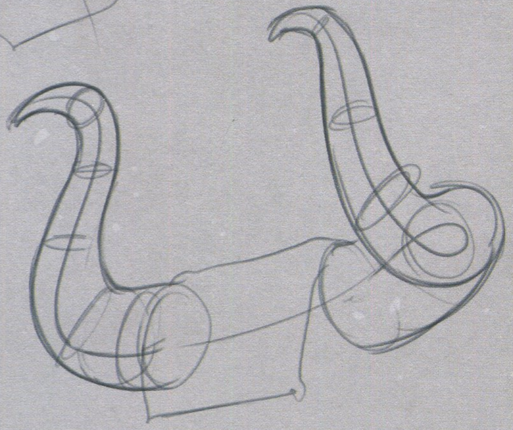
IMAGINING BANGLES ALONG A CURVING ROPE TO CONSTRUCT THE FOUNDATION

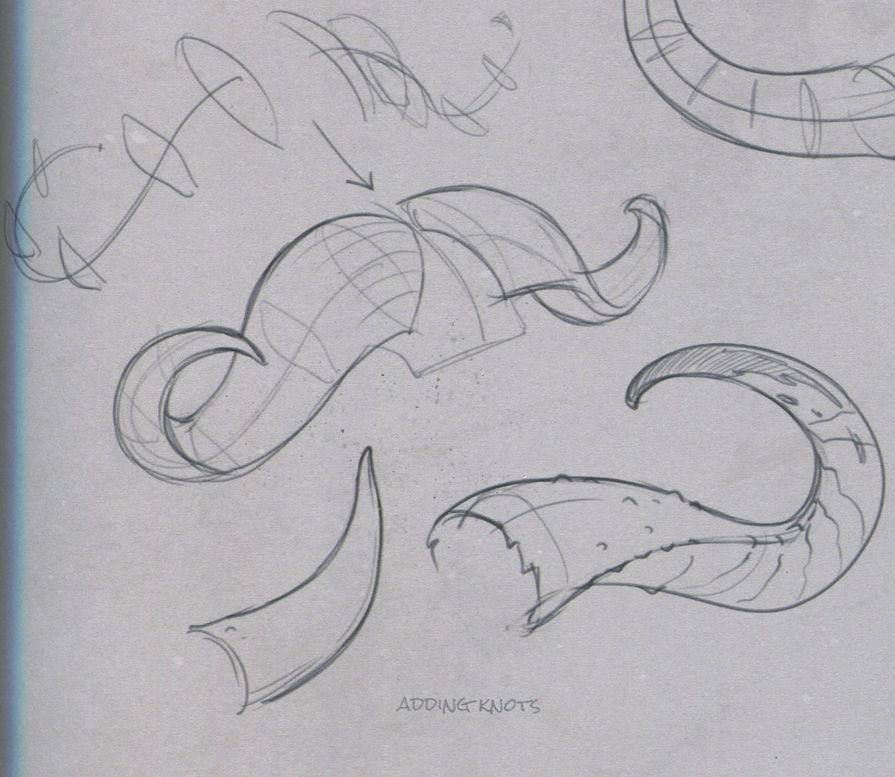


CONNECTING THE OUTER EDGES OF THE BASIC SHAPES



USING DIFFERENT TYPES OF "SCAFFOLDING"





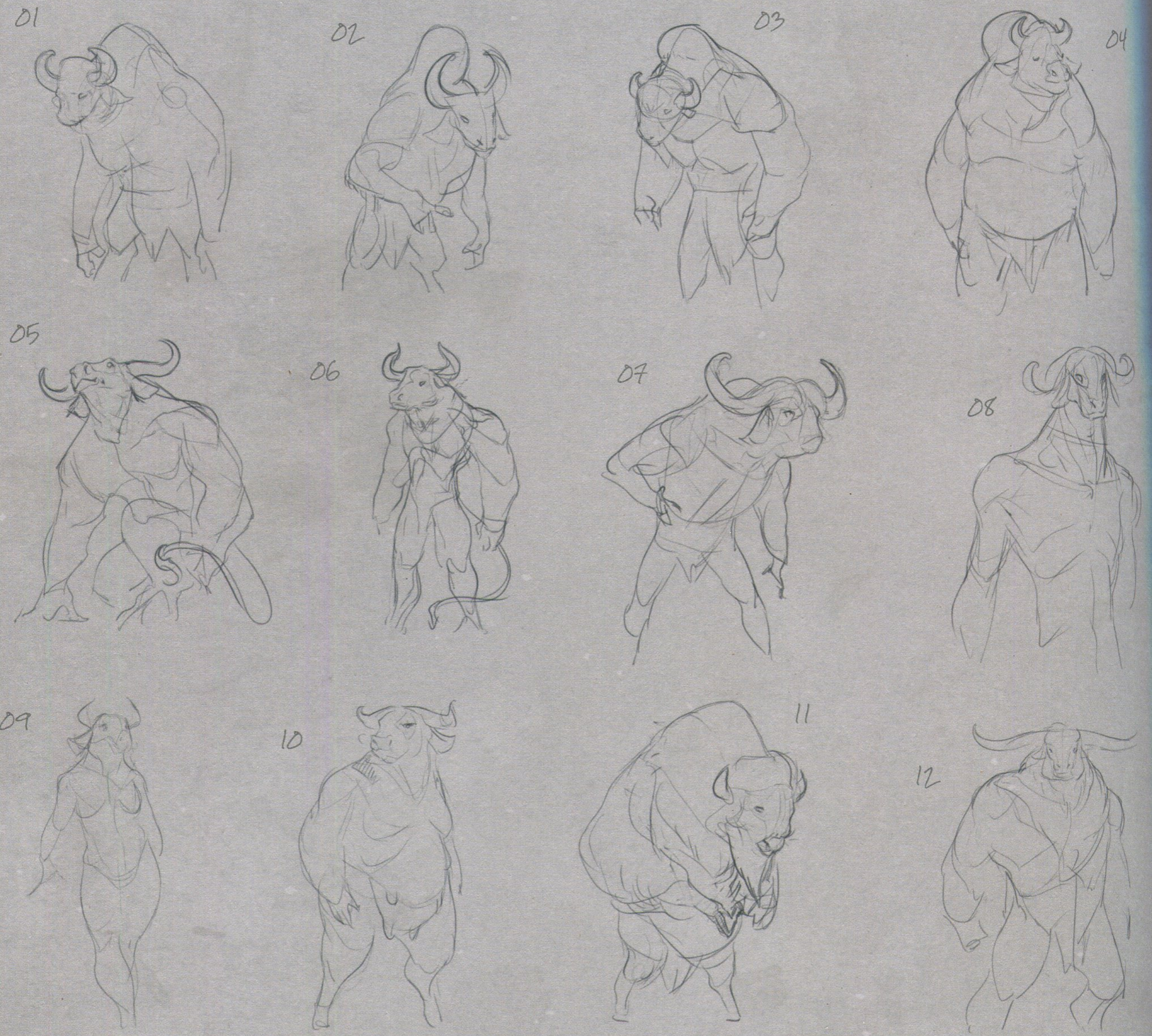
ADDING KNOTS

• DESIGN PROCESS •

Thumbnails

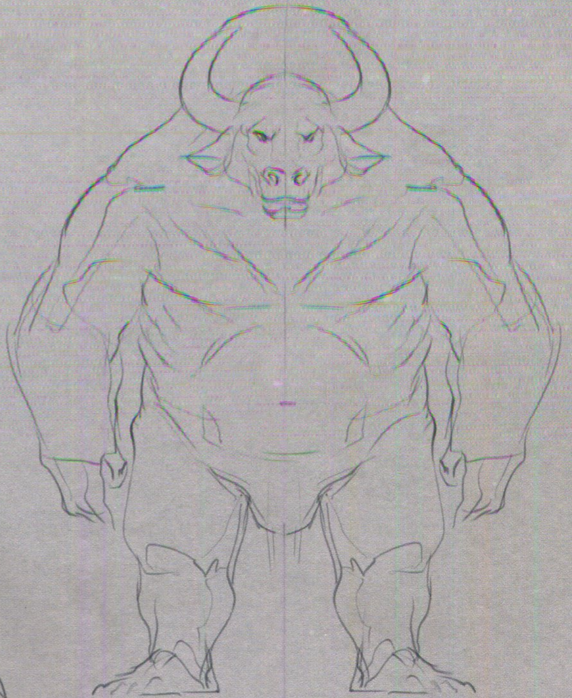
During the thumbnail stage I wanted to work out an interesting weighting between the bull and human side of the Minotaur. Many depictions have a heavily bovine head and hind-limbs, and only have human anatomy across the chest and arms, while more classic versions are almost entirely human, with just the head of the bull. I enjoyed playing around with these different combinations. I think devoting most of the shoulders to a very muscular bull-like shape while keeping the lower body much more human creates an interesting and imposing silhouette.

I also varied the curve and length of the horns slightly to see what worked best, and practiced integrating the tail into different poses. In thumbnail 11 I introduced a thicker fur coat that almost drapes around the creature's arms and acts like a beard; however, it hides the intimidating musculature of the torso and makes it appear more like a wise old man than a terrifying beast. The hump works well in some of the thumbnails as it gives the beast a more deformed look, hinting at its unnatural origins. It also enhances the effect of the powerful, hulking upper body.

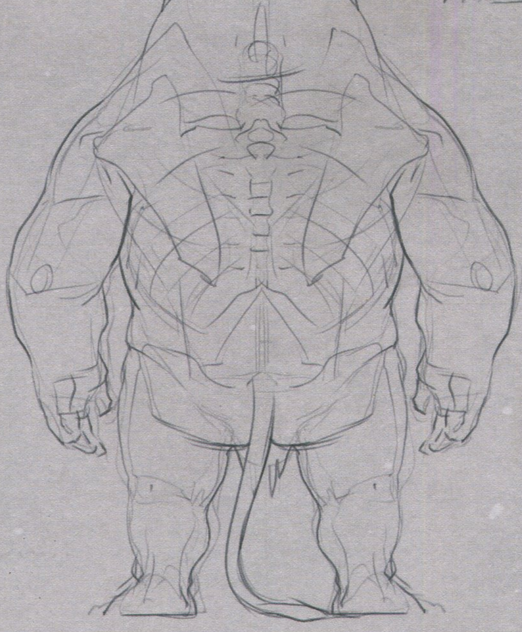


Further exploration

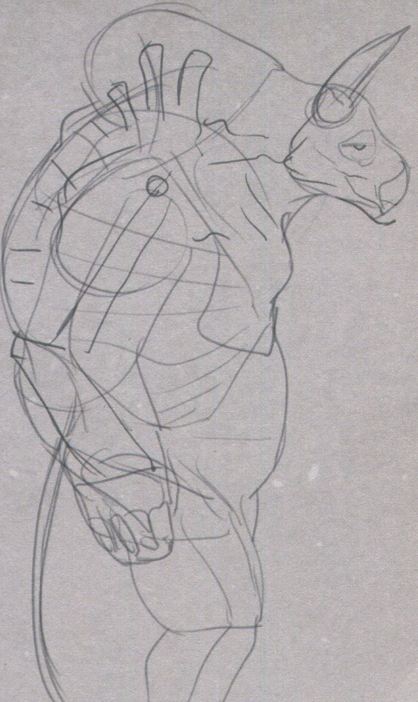
Moving forward with a muscular version of the Minotaur, I tried to keep the limbs mostly human in general structure, but made sure I kept them heavily muscled to demonstrate the power of the bull side of the creature. Something I need to watch out for is keeping the silhouette of the shoulders and upper back interesting; because he is hunched forwards most of the time, the horns and head will often be inside the silhouette of the body. I chose to use feet rather than hooves, sticking to the classical interpretation of the Minotaur.



The main thing I tried to capture from behind was the mass of the shoulders. Roughing in some of the skeleton, I wanted to dramatically exaggerate the size of the scapulae (shoulder blades) compared to a regular human body. You can also see the tail from this angle, an element that is easily forgotten in comparison to the other bull elements.



The side angle gives the best overall impression of the Minotaur's shape, with the hefty shoulder hump and heavily hunched-forward neck and head. I counterbalanced the heavy head by hanging the arms quite a long way back. Balance is important even in a neutral pose, and will need to be considered as I explore further poses. I again sketched in some of the underlying structure to help me keep a realistic and workable anatomy in mind.

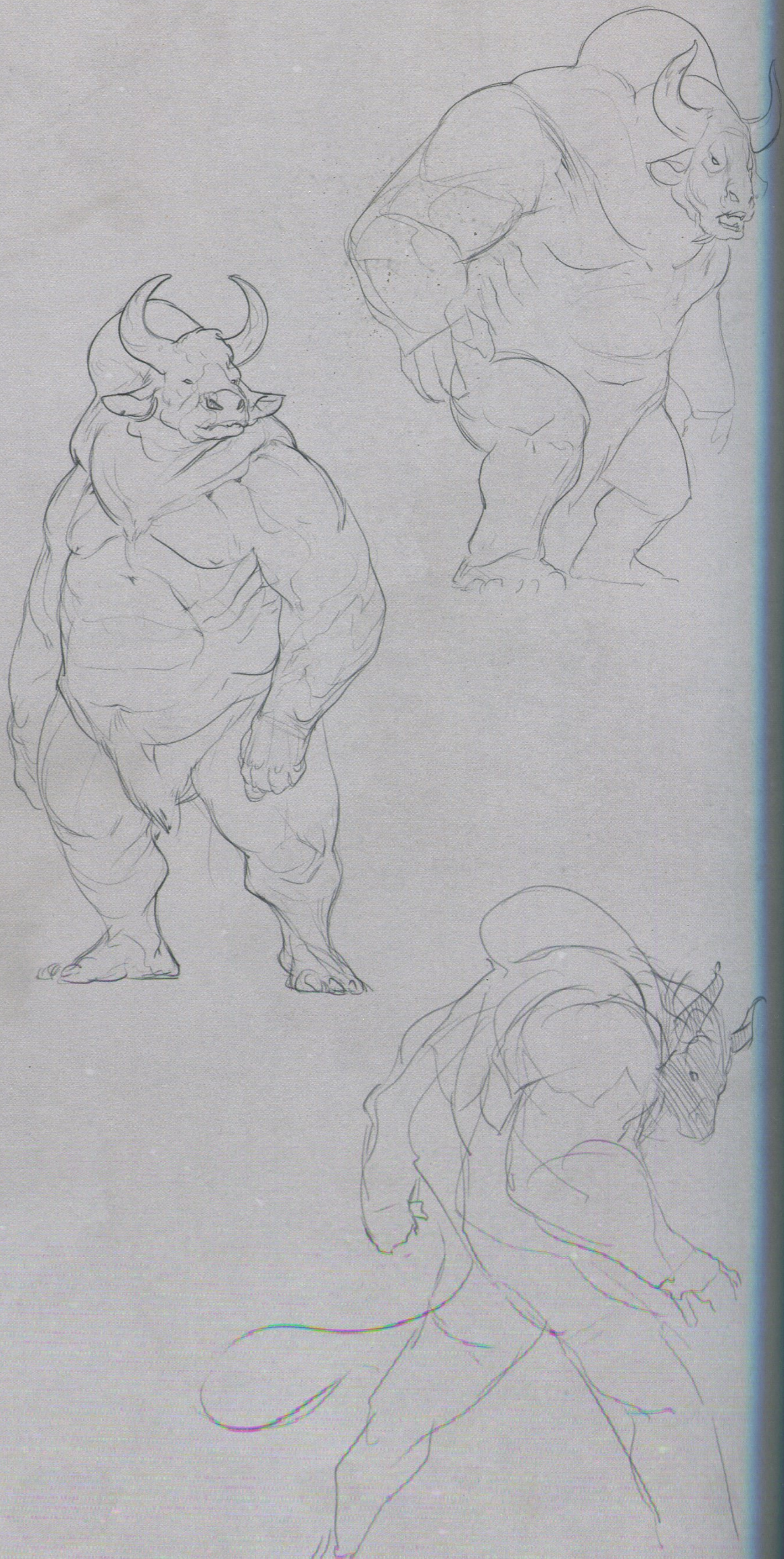


Poses

For the initial pose I chose a three-quarter angle, spreading the legs a little to hold the bulk of the upper body. The arms remain quite close to the side so the feel of the creature is still very solid and powerful. However, this doesn't necessarily make for a super interesting or dramatic pose. I do like how the horn and face break the silhouette of the body, but something with a bit more action would better communicate the ferocity of the beast.

Next, the Minotaur is in a more relaxed pose. The three-quarter view of the head again enhances the silhouette of the hump and horns. I really wanted to capture the exaggerated shoulder muscles in this sketch. The pose is very human-like, which reduces the beastly, frightening look I want to achieve.

A more dramatic twist of the body gives the final pose a much more dynamic silhouette. A pose with the Minotaur looking back over his shoulder gives the impression that someone has perhaps just come across him in his lair, creating a feeling of fear and tension. While he is still very muscular and bulky in this position, because the limbs are spread quite wide, he feels a lot more human and looks slightly more agile. A powerful monster with intelligence and deftness would be very frightening.



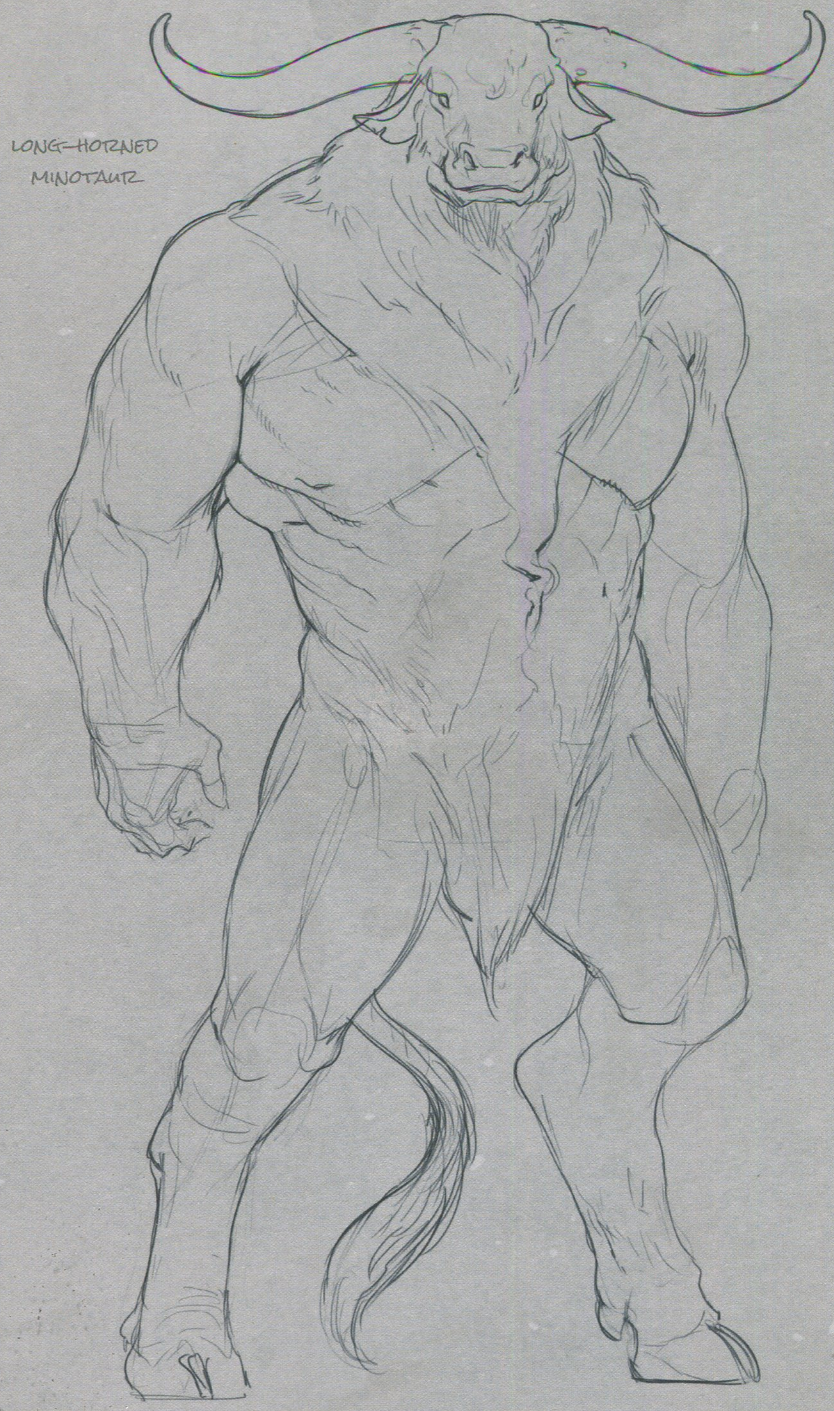
• SUBSPECIES •

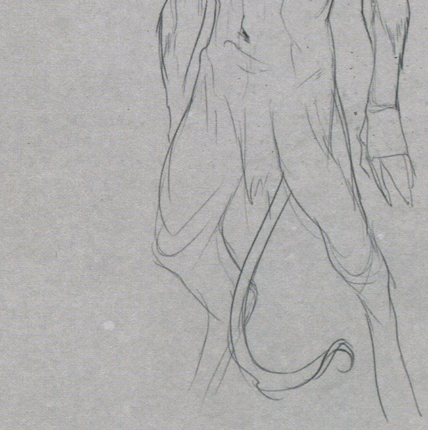
Long-horned Minotaur

Even with the bull legs, the long-horned Minotaur is still reminiscent of the more classical interpretation of the Minotaur in that it is quite humanoid in areas apart from the head; the upright pose of the neck and head makes it feel more civilized rather than animalistic. Standing much taller than its common cousin, it possesses an equal amount of power in its heavily muscled body. The head is inherited from that of a domesticated cow, and the subspecies is known to be the better tempered of the Minotaur family.

Kalahari Minotaur

Perhaps a wiser (though not necessarily friendlier) subspecies, the Kalahari Minotaur is again more human than the common Minotaur, with scrawny features matching the wirier hair and knotted horns. Dwelling in the Kalahari Desert, he is able to withstand the harsh climate of a desert environment where it is impractical to develop the same sort of "bullish" muscle mass as its relatives.

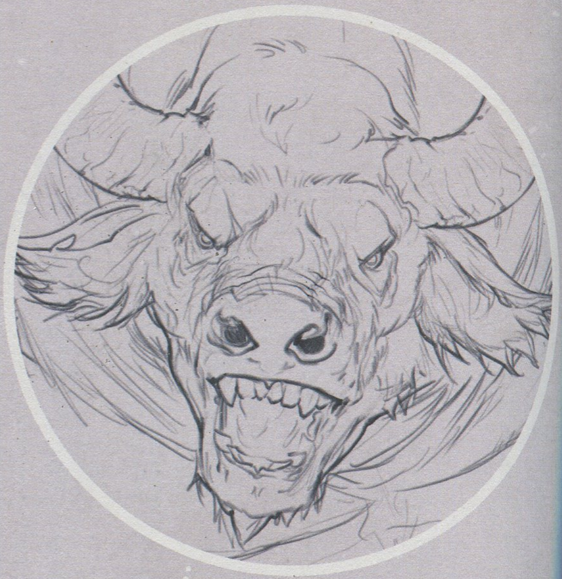


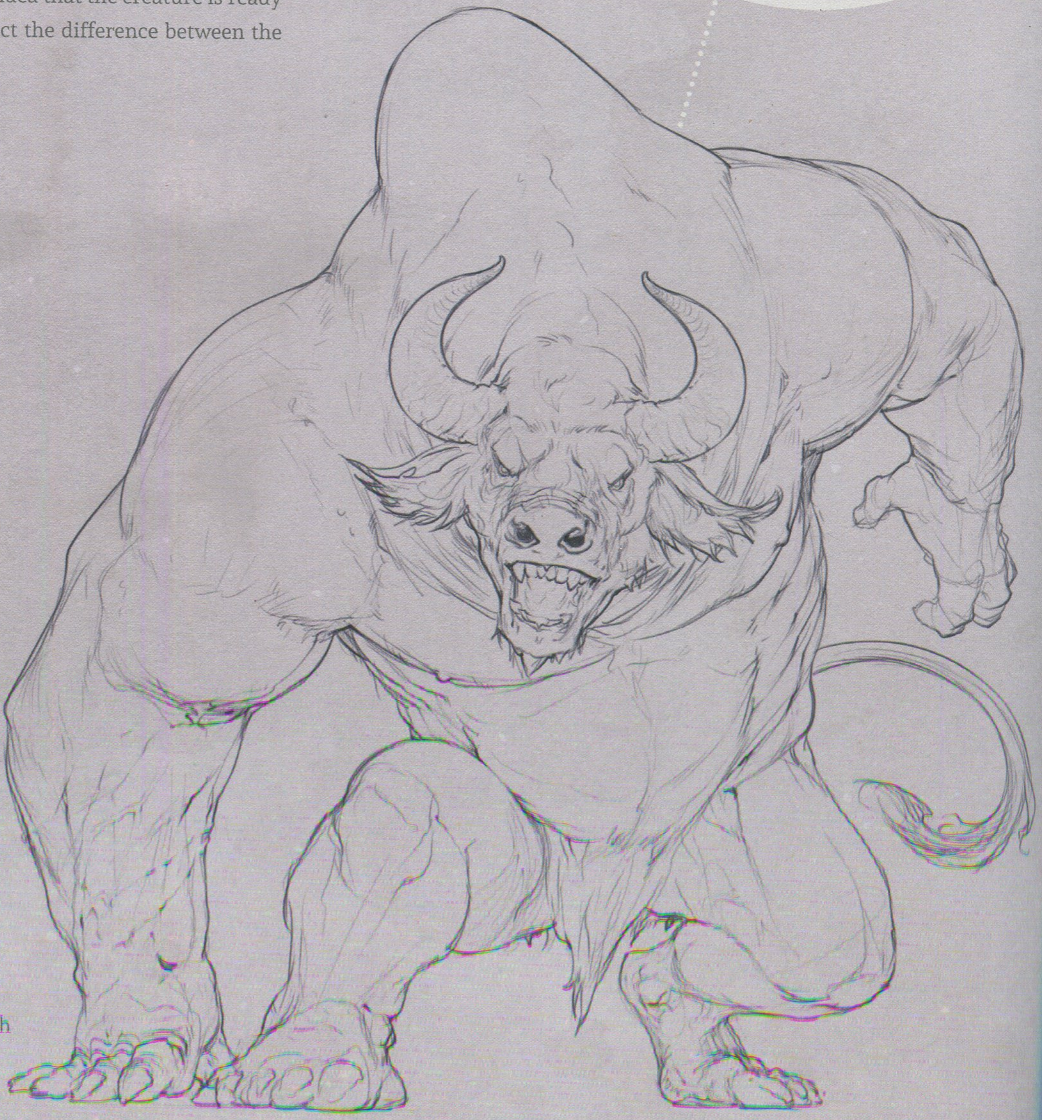


• FINAL DESIGN •

The final pose really captures the power and ferocity of the Minotaur: the beast is roaring at the viewer, crouched down as if prepared to charge forward. Spreading the arms wide emphasizes the heft across the bull-like muscles of the shoulders and torso, and also helps to create a dynamic silhouette. Even though I chose human-like anatomy for the arms, torso, and legs, I made sure that everything remained bulky so that it feels like one cohesive creature.

In terms of coloration and covering I thought that a fine layer of coarse fur would work best to show off the musculature while still feeling very animalistic. The deep color of the fur is reminiscent of the type of bull you would see in traditional bull fighting, which adds to the idea that the creature is ready to charge. The paler limbs reflect the difference between the bovine and human aspects.

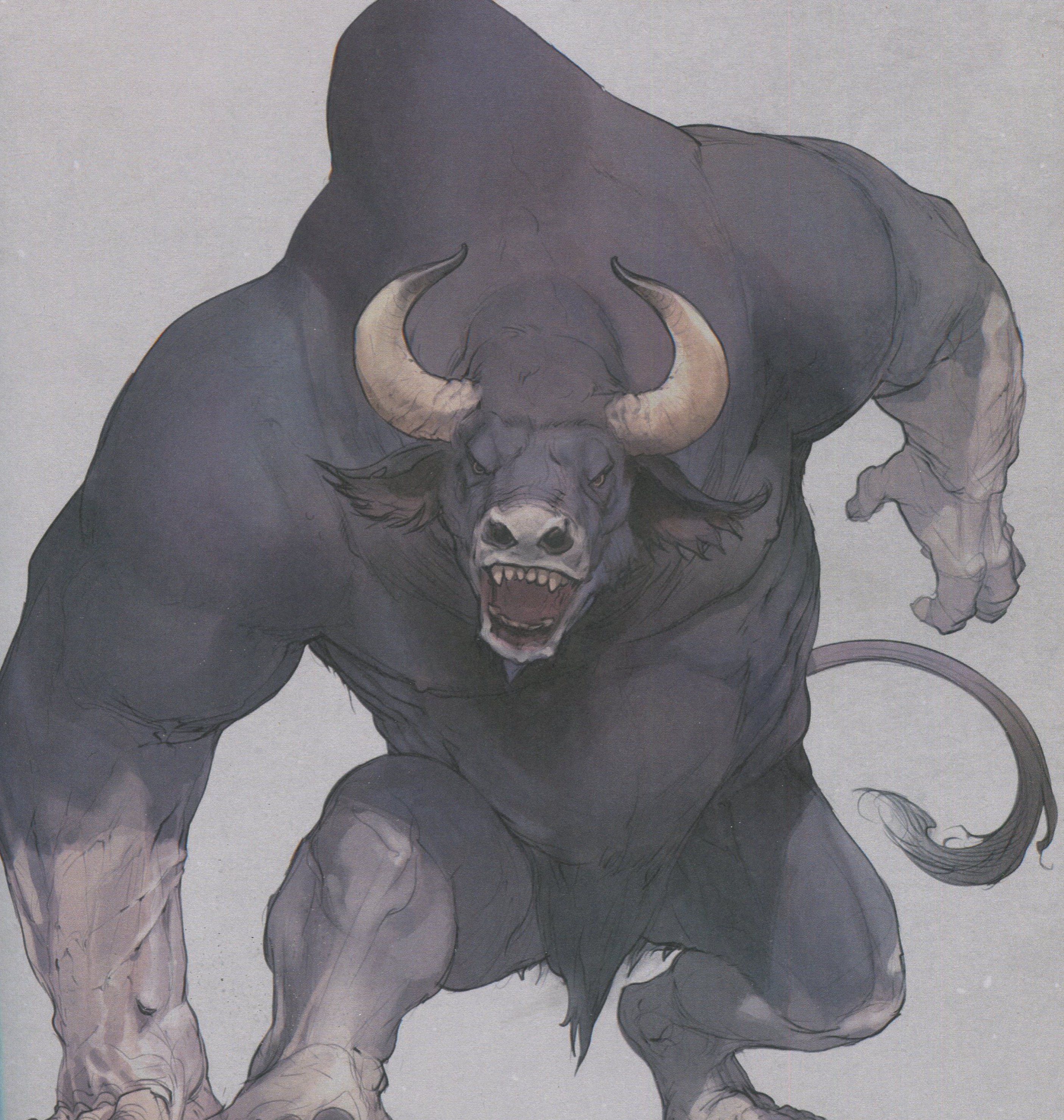


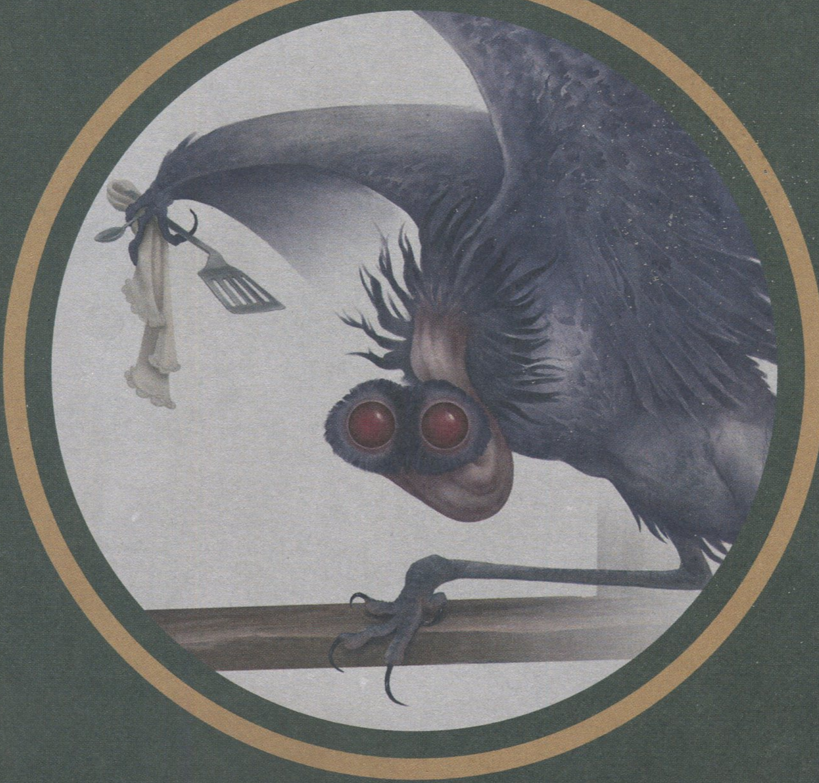


Key facts

Name: Minotaur
Taxonomy: Bull, human
Region: Greece
Habitat: Mediterranean
Mythical abilities: Brute strength
Threat to humans: 3

Final image © Luke Mancini





• MOTHMAN •

The Mothman is an American cryptid shrouded in legend, having garnered an eerie reputation ever since it was first sighted swooping out of a shadowy West Virginia forest in the 1960s. Described as a tall, dusky figure with a vast wingspan and glowing crimson eyes embedded in its chest, the creature's name is thought to be a reference to a popular TV villain at the time. The Mothman loomed over Point Pleasant, Virginia, from 1966, and had numerous run-ins with terrified locals before suddenly disappearing following the collapse of the Silver Bridge in the winter of 1967. The accident killed 46 people and gave rise to the Mothman's reputation as an omen of impending disaster. Despite its infamy, the creature was never seen again, seemingly satisfied with its final act of destruction. Although numerous explanations have since been brought forth, the sightings remain largely unexplained, and some claim the Mothman still inhabits the dilapidated munitions plant just outside the city limit.

• KRISTINA LEXOVA •

Creature artist • www.klexova.com

• FIELD NOTES •

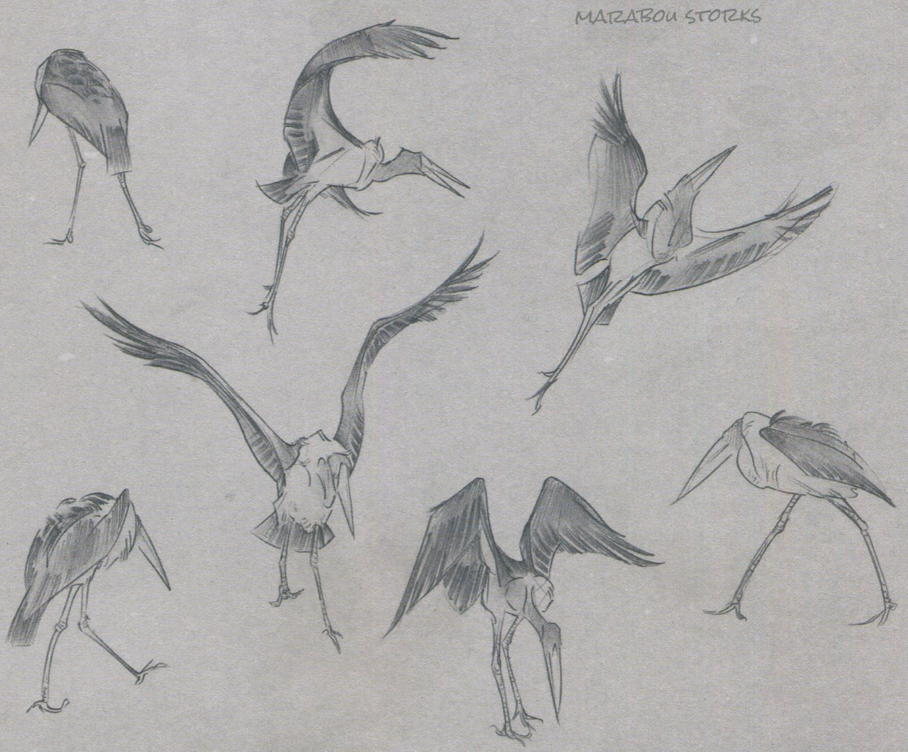
Marabou stork

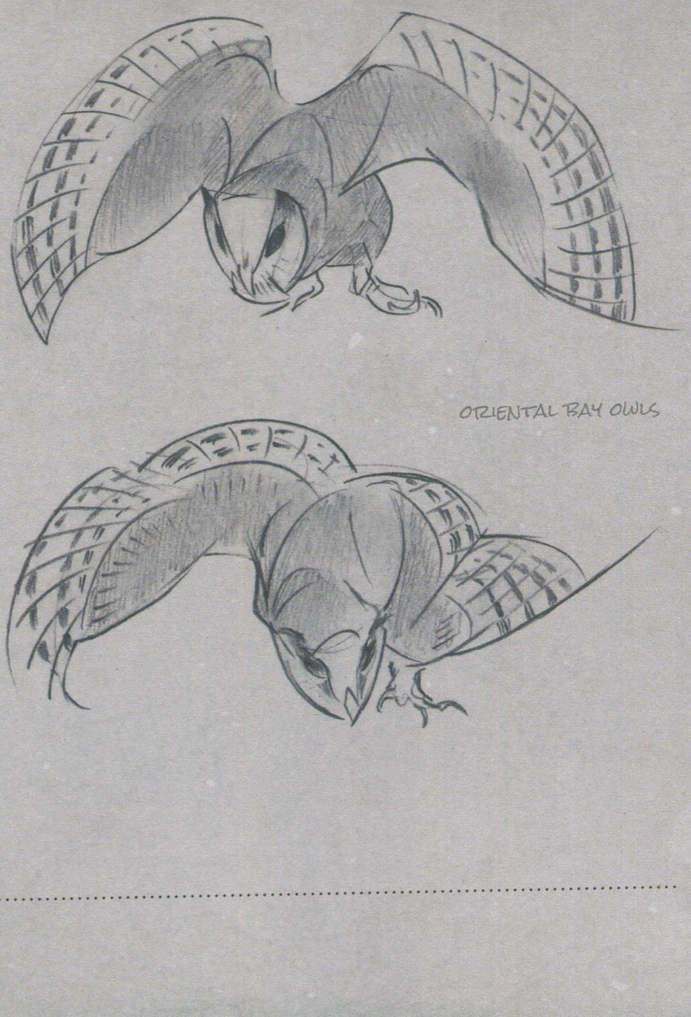
When designing a creature, its character can often be just as important as its visual impact. When one is able to tell at a glance how a creature would move and act, it gives the viewer a chance to make an emotional connection, adding an extra layer to a visually compelling design. Gestural sketches of animals, referenced from life or from videos, allow me to explore this side of the Mothman, without becoming too caught up in the visual details too early.

The marabou stork is my strongest influence for this creature design. These massive birds have a stiff, ungainly demeanor to them that is only exacerbated by their grotesque appearance and foul temper. Despite this, they are elegant in flight, and their impressive wingspan allows them to soar through the sky effortlessly while searching for carrion. With its head tucked away safely in a woolly ruff of feathers, one could almost assume that the marabou stork lacks a neck completely.

Oriental bay owl

The face of the oriental bay owl, closely related to the common barn owl, is particularly unnerving, dominated by a V-shaped forehead that gives the impression that its large, dark eyes are slanting downwards menacingly. As I will base the bulk of the Mothman design on birds, I would like to find a clever way to obscure the beak of the Mothman in order to truly allow the eyes to be the most prominent feature of the face. Several bird species are known to possess specialized feathers of varying size and function surrounding their beaks; in owls, they are called filoplumes and act as sensory hairs, helping them to manipulate their prey at night.



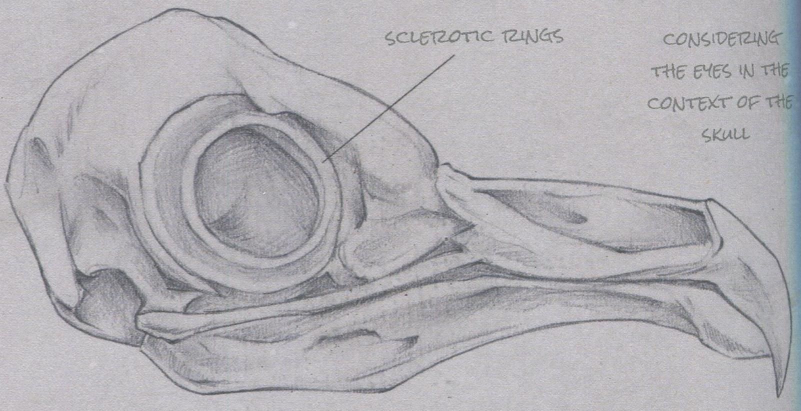


Bird eyes

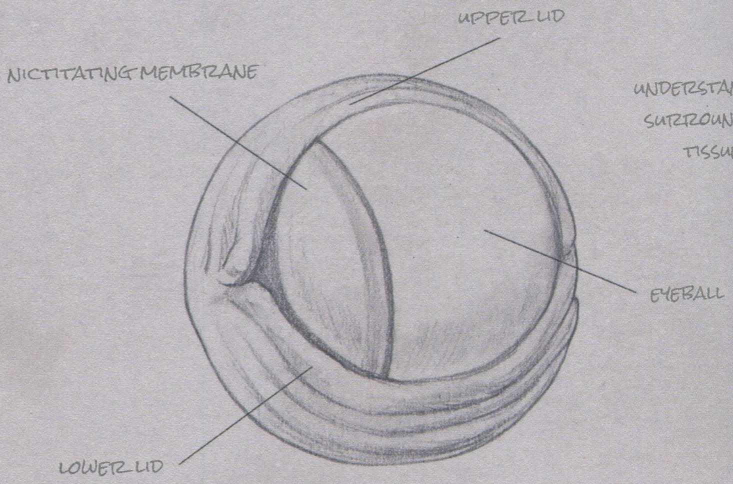
A useful first step in designing creature eyes is determining where they would lie within the skull. In owls (and the Mothman, most probably), tubular eyes are held in place and supported by bony structures, the sclerotic rings. Because the eyes cannot be moved, the owl must rotate its entire head to look around, and can do so by up to 270 degrees. According to legend, the eyes of the Mothman are exceptionally large, and will take up a lot of space in the skull as a result. Examples from nature, such as potoo birds, will help me stay within the bounds of realism.

Once the eye is correctly placed, it is time to add the soft tissue that encircles it. Whereas most mammals have two eyelids, birds tend to have three: the upper lid, the lower lid, and the nictitating membrane, a translucent "lid" that slides across the eye horizontally. Its purpose in most animals is to provide added protection against injury and debris. In some birds, this membrane is nearly transparent, allowing them to see even when the eye is closed. Additional details, such as loose skin and wrinkles, provide a smoother transition into the remainder of the face.

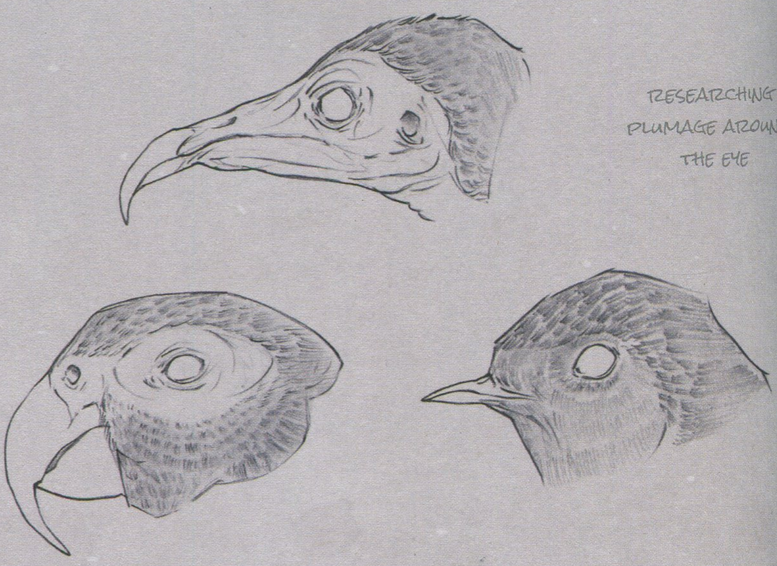
Finally, it is time to consider how feathers would grow around the eye and blend into the surrounding plumage. With certain birds, such as parrots, the feathers nearest to the eye are sparse, growing denser as they move farther away. Sometimes the area around the eye is left almost completely bare, as is seen with some vultures. In many birds, the feathers of the face border almost directly next to the eye. For the Mothman, I want to draw even more attention to the already prominent eyes by leaving a ring of bare skin around them.



CONSIDERING THE EYES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SKULL



UNDERSTANDING SURROUNDING TISSUE



RESEARCHING PLUMAGE AROUND THE EYE

Bird wings

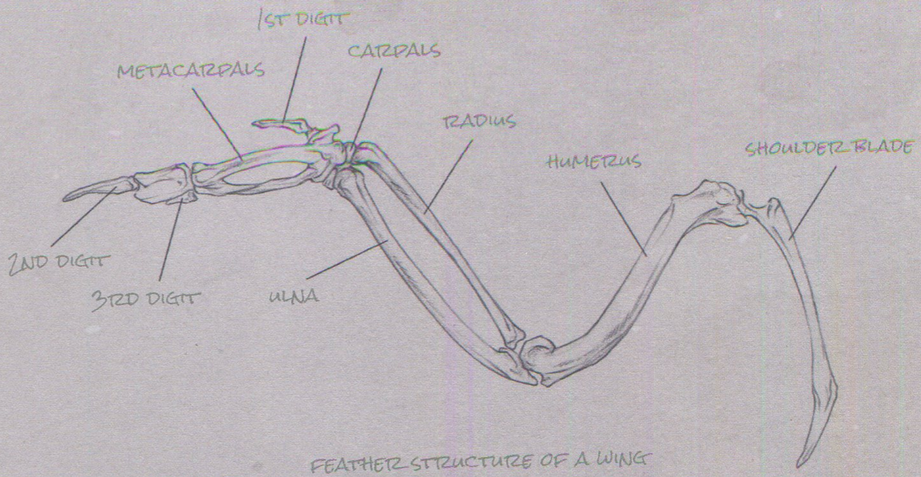
As opposed to copying shapes from images and attempting to guess what is happening underneath the feather layers, truly understanding the structure of the avian wing allows for less guesswork in the design process, as well as more inventive wing poses for the creature. All vertebrates alive today (including us!) originated from a common ancestor, and as a result our anatomical structures tend to mirror those of other animals. The wing of a bird is analogous to our arm, and is likewise split into upper arm, lower arm, and hand portions, as shown on the right here.

The feathers of wings have been fine-tuned over years of evolution to perform perfectly in flight. Consequently, they are not simply jumbled together but arranged rather neatly according to their function. Indispensable for flight, the remiges, or flight feathers, are affixed firmly to the wing bones by tissue. They are split into three groups – the primary, secondary, and tertiary remiges – and are most responsible for the shape of the wing.

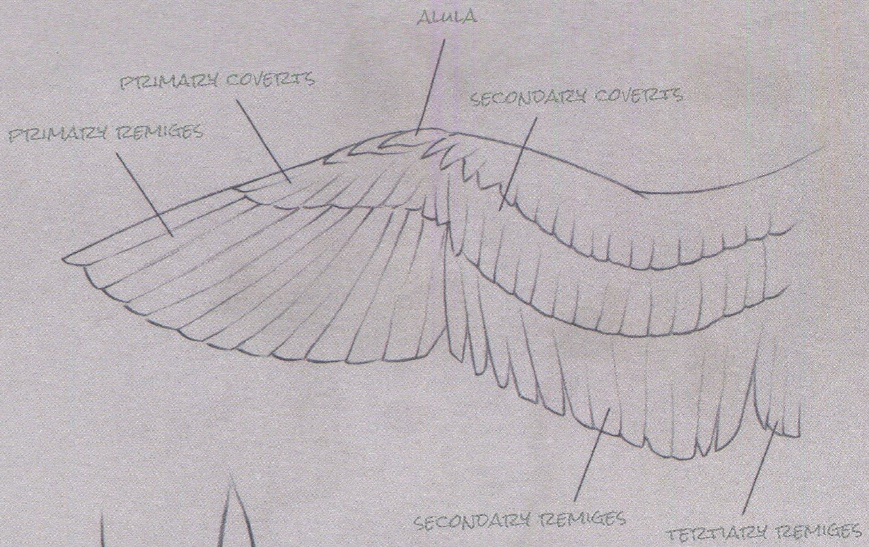
Covert feathers likewise split into groups depending on their location, covering the remiges and reducing drag over the wings. The alula, which you can also see in the feather structure sketch, is the bird's "thumb," and works like the slats on an aircraft's wing.

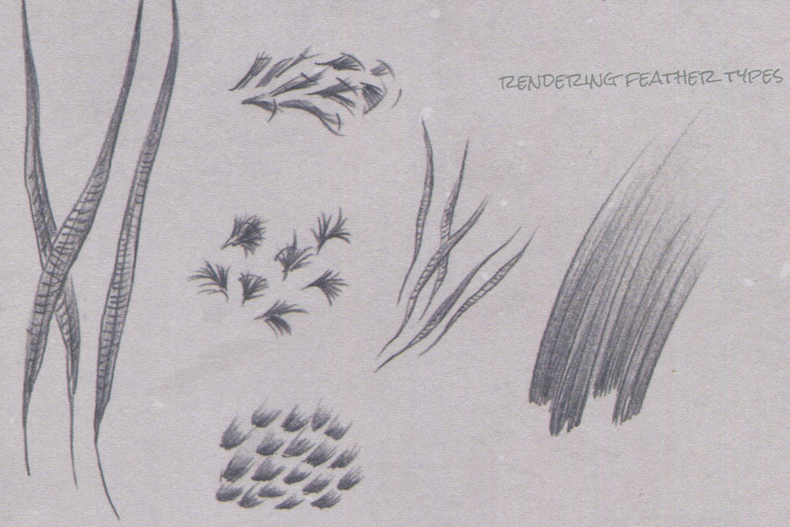
Detailing each individual feather can be time-consuming outside scientific illustration. Instead, knowing the different feather areas and types allows me to simplify the basic shapes of not only the wing but the whole body of a feathered creature. The flight feathers are long and flat, and I define them with broad areas of value, alternating with horizontal strokes if I want to add detail. The coverts are rounder and shorter, overlapping like roof tiles across the wing. I draw them with quick, almost stippling strokes, letting the tops fade out so they are easier on the eye.

SKELETAL STRUCTURE OF A WING



FEATHER STRUCTURE OF A WING





• DESIGN PROCESS •

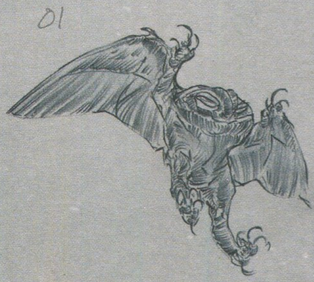
Thumbnails

Although original witness descriptions form a base for this Mothman design, I would like to steer away from the traditional depiction of a purely evil being. The idea of an extremely curious and intelligent yet fundamentally shy creature that unintentionally frightens people with its appearance strikes me as more compelling, in addition to providing a likelier scenario, given the behavior of many birds.

Initially, I stick to the source material, sketching designs with a stout build and broad chest (thumbnails 01 and 02) before slowly moving away to explore some less straightforward representations. The large eyes are kept as a common trait between all renditions, as it is the one feature I feel would be hardest to mistake for something else. A few of the designs lean more towards the sinister side (05, 09, and 12), while others are quite silly (10, a Mothman with red decorative "eyes" on its chest).

The thumbnail I end up choosing (04) has elements of both, sporting a gangly and untidy appearance as well as a featherless neck that can be retracted back into the chest. The best way for me to know if a design will work is to imagine it alive: moving, eating, and partaking in other creaturely activities. If I already feel intrigued and can almost see it right in front of me, it is usually a good sign of something that can be taken to a final design.

01



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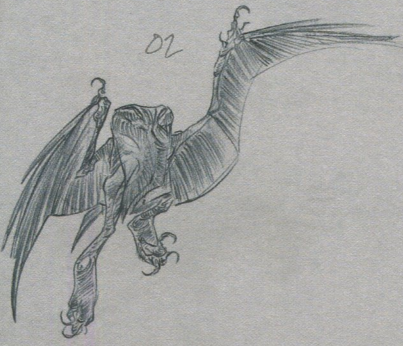

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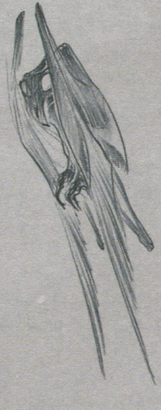

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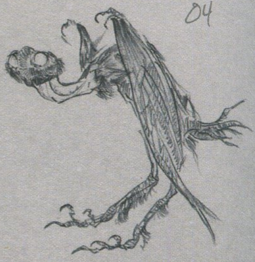

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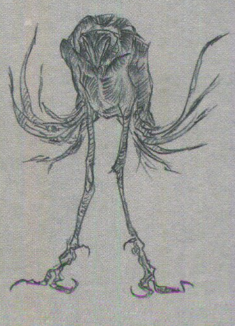

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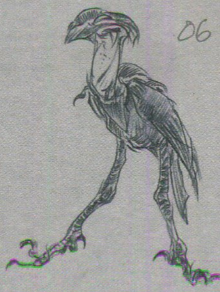

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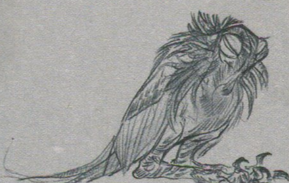

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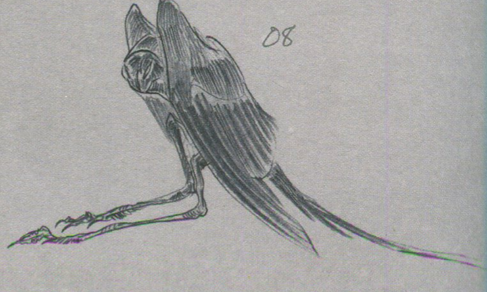

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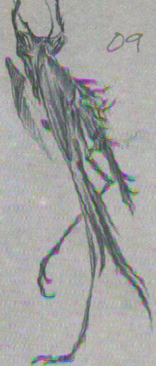

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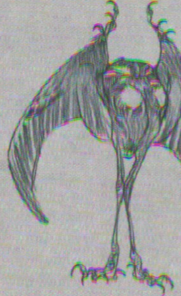

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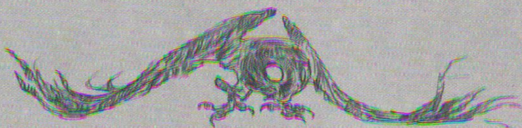

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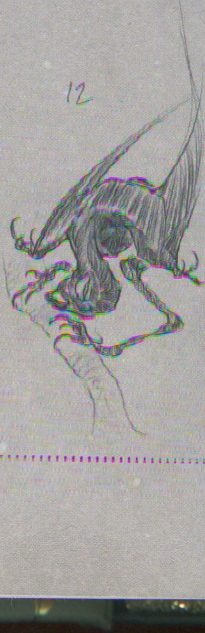


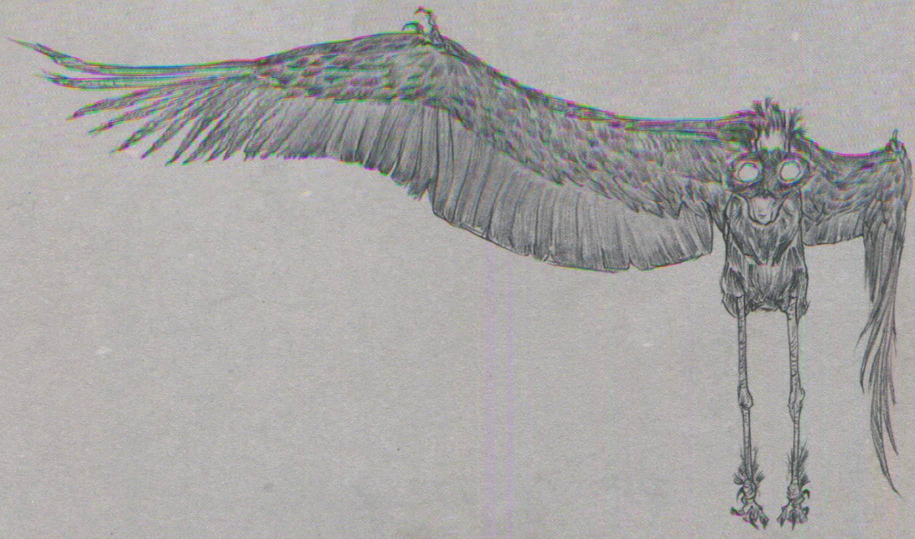
Further exploration

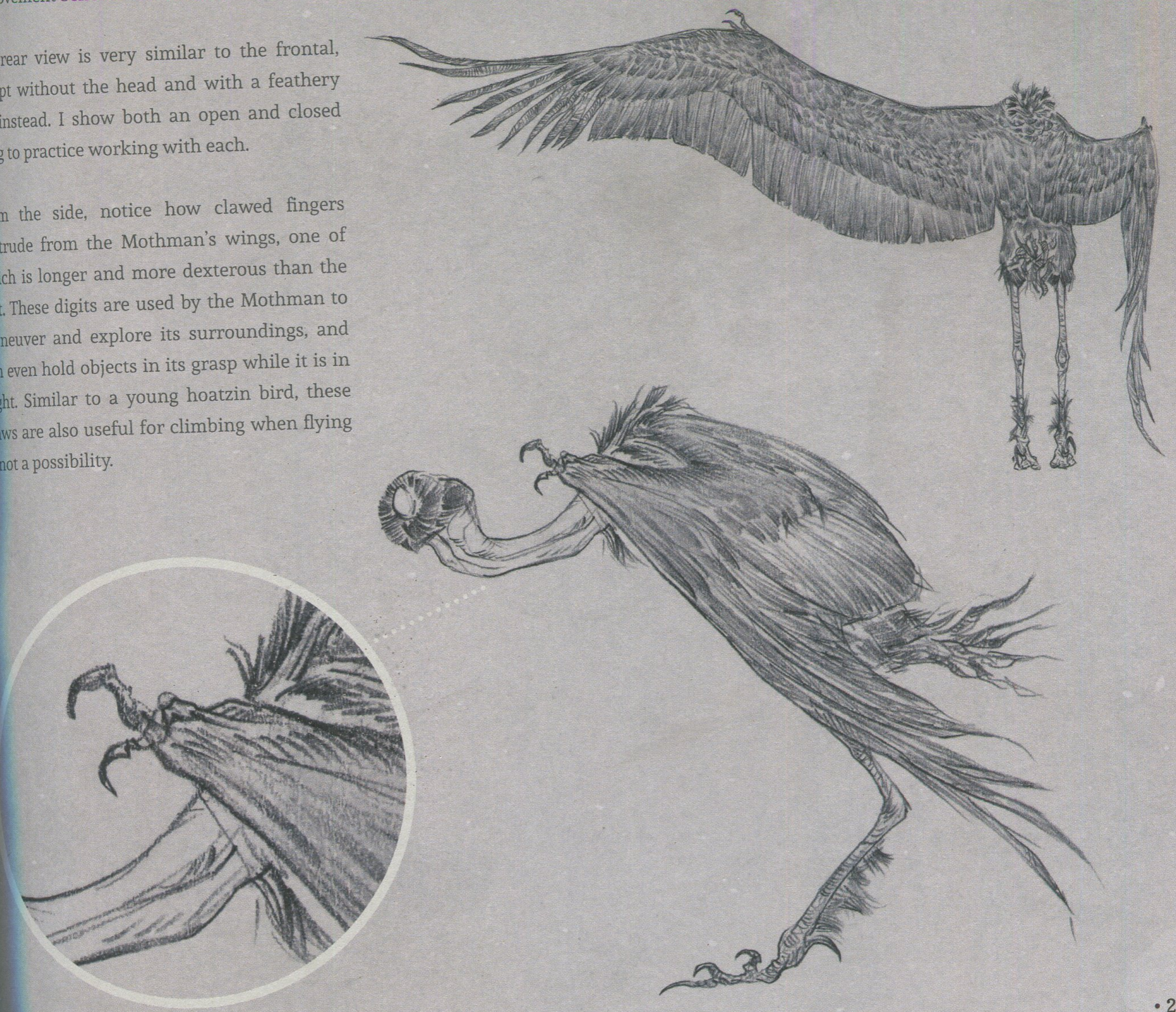
Observing the Mothman frontally, one can more easily see how the headless aspect of the sightings must have originated. Although it has a long neck, the Mothman here tends to tuck it away entirely when in flight or resting, making the large, unblinking eyes seem like they originate from the chest.

Fish and frogs are among the Mothman's favorite prey, and its stilt-like legs allow it to wade out into the shallow marshes of its habitat to hunt them. A nocturnal animal, the Mothman's incredible eyesight lets it survey the water in complete darkness, waiting to strike with lightning speed at the slightest sign of movement beneath the surface.

The rear view is very similar to the frontal, except without the head and with a feathery tail instead. I show both an open and closed wing to practice working with each.

From the side, notice how clawed fingers protrude from the Mothman's wings, one of which is longer and more dexterous than the rest. These digits are used by the Mothman to maneuver and explore its surroundings, and can even hold objects in its grasp while it is in flight. Similar to a young hoatzin bird, these claws are also useful for climbing when flying is not a possibility.

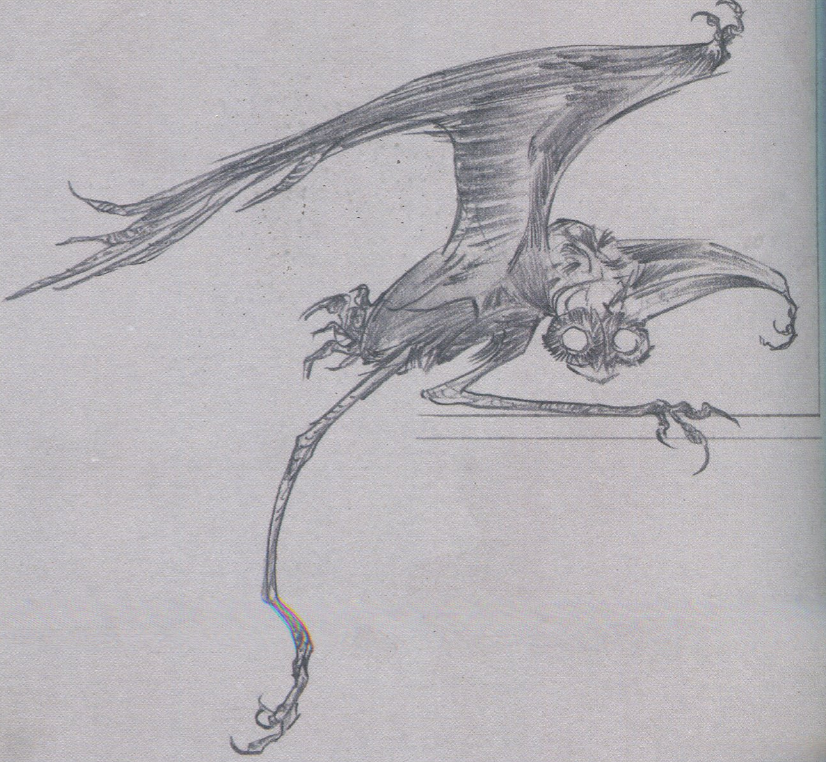


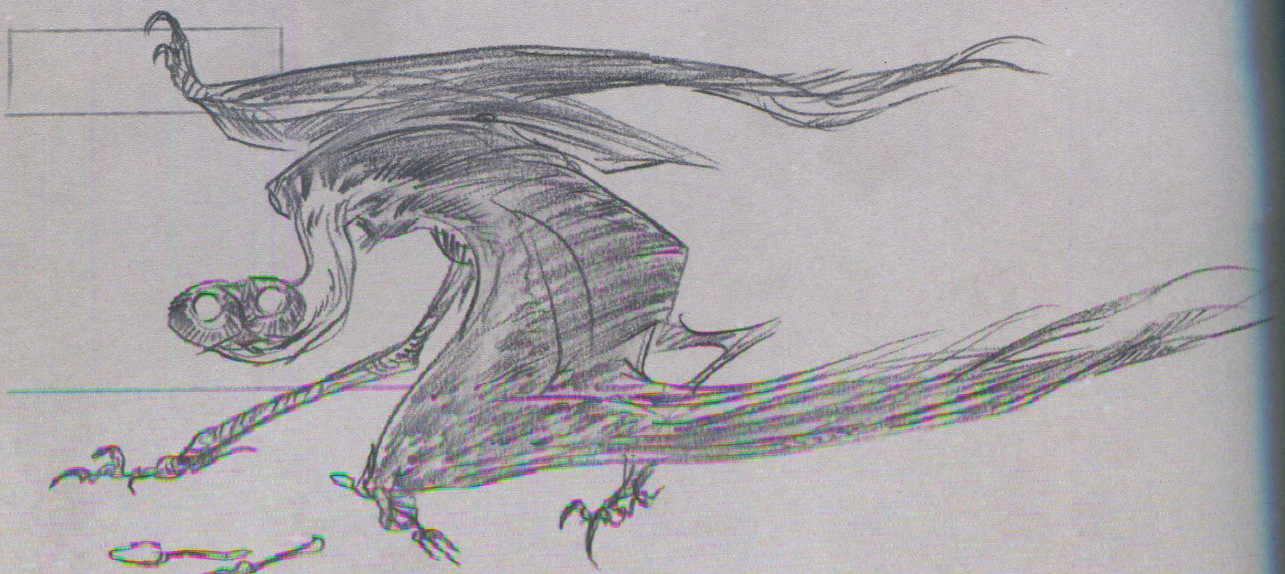


Poses

The Mothman is deeply curious about humans, and as a result will often enter houses to rifle through drawers and marvel at the belongings it finds. Sparkling silverware would probably be particularly enticing to it, and I try to imagine the viewpoint of someone coming home and finding the Mothman in their kitchen. In the pose on the right here, the Mothman is attempting to shimmy sideways through a window, but its long legs and wings are making it quite an awkward maneuver.

In the pose below, the Mothman has been caught just as it is searching the kitchen for treasure. Silverware is strewn about haphazardly, and a utensil has been stolen to be taken back to the nest. The creature is frozen in place with its eyes fixed on the viewer, and one of its hands hovers over the drawer handle. In a moment, the silence will be broken as the Mothman attempts to scramble out of the window to safety.

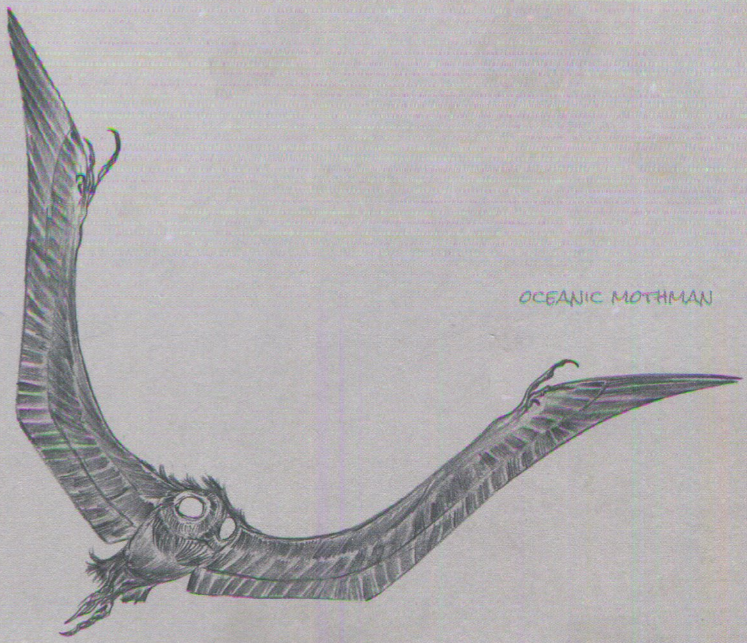




• SUBSPECIES •

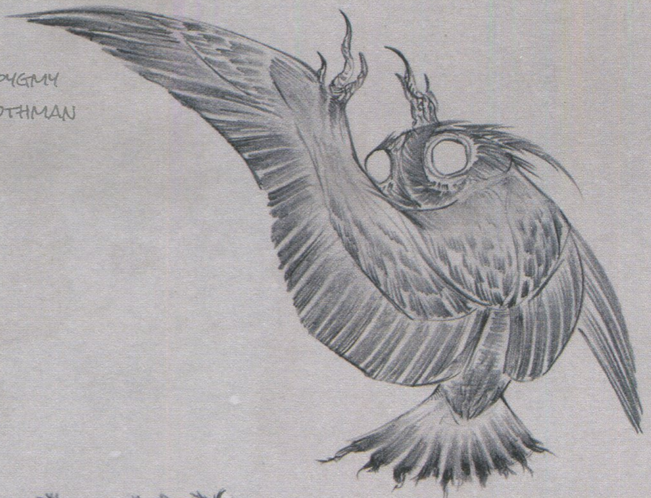
Oceanic Mothman

Feared for centuries by even the most seasoned of seafarers, the oceanic Mothman has the largest wingspan of the Mothman species, an adaptation for soaring flight on the open waters. Sailors would tie offerings of freshly slaughtered animals to the bowsprit of their ships in an effort to appease this ominous creature, believing it had the ability to control the weather. This subspecies comes out at night to feed on squid, and is thought to reside on secluded islands, although a colony has yet to be observed.



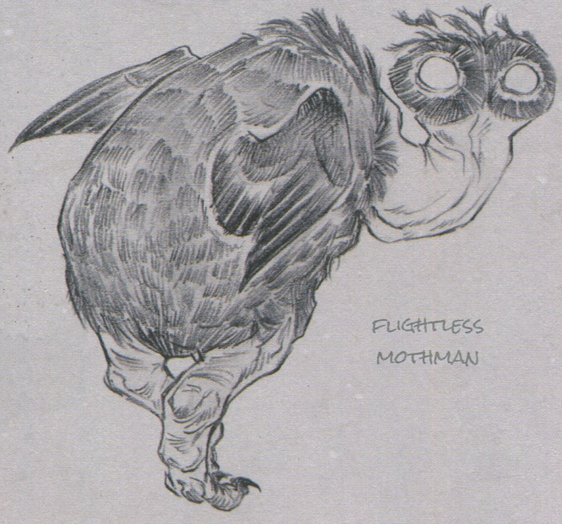
Pygmy Mothman

This miniature subspecies of Mothman has sharp claws and compact wings, perfectly adapted to hunting in the dense forests it calls home. The pygmy Mothman is a solitary creature, and can often be found watching over its massive territory from atop the tallest trees of the forest. Although few of the elusive subspecies have ever been sighted, they are well known for their haunting, far-carrying cries, said to sound like a human screaming.



Flightless Mothman

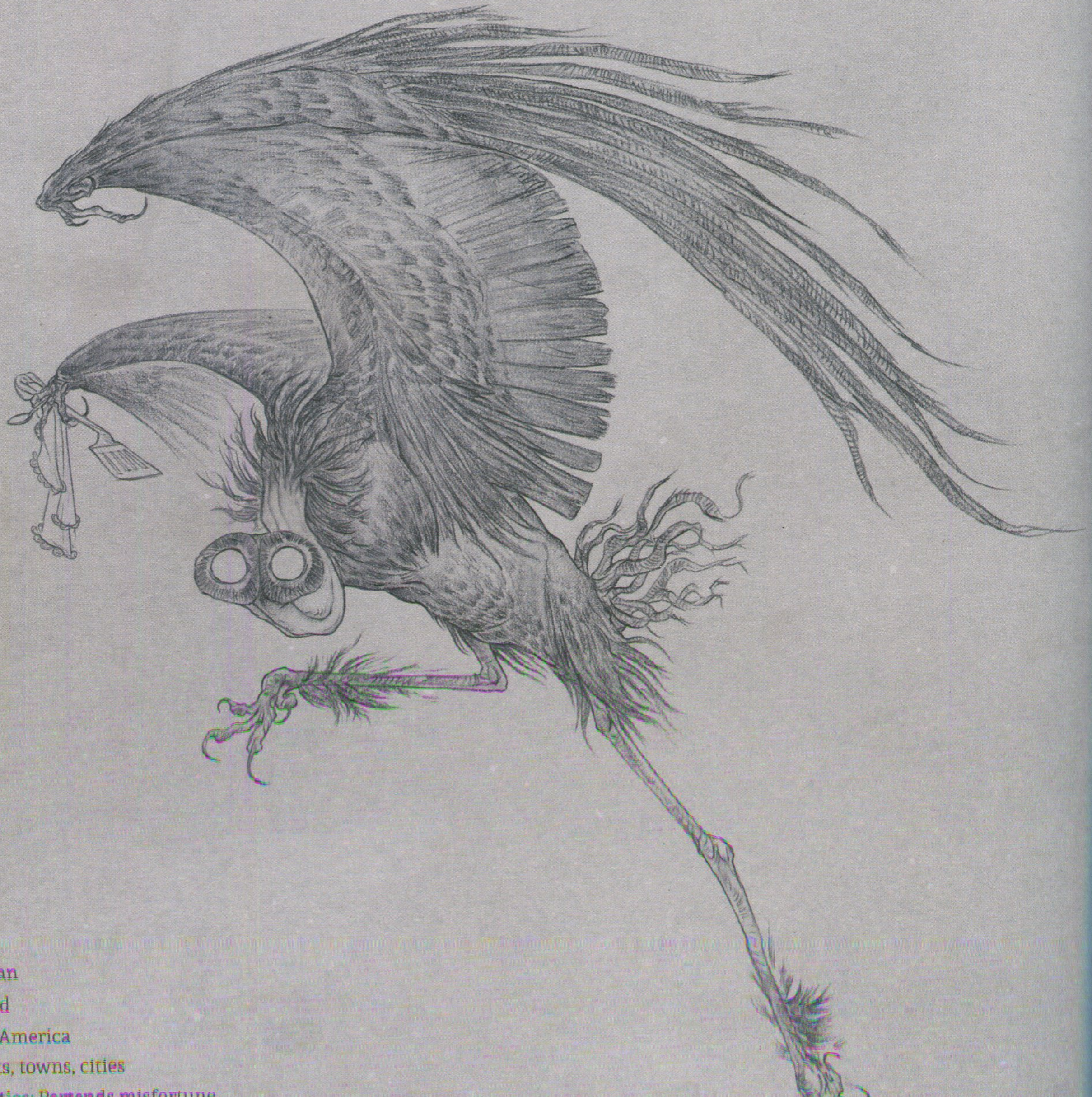
Inhabiting the dark, damp jungle underbrush and rarely venturing into the sunlight, the flightless Mothman is worshipped as a guardian of the forest by those who have seen it. It is a heavyset creature with small, vestigial wings and strong legs, which it uses to dig through the soil in search of insects and other small prey. This subspecies has an incredibly long and flexible neck, enabling it to preen even the most difficult-to-reach feathers.



• FINAL DESIGN •

A traditional pencil drawing and digital watercolor techniques are combined to bring the final Mothman image to life. The red eyes are painted in first, as they are the most important attribute of this creature and form an anchor for the coloring and detailing as the image progresses. I take care not to detract too much attention from them, keeping the feathers simple and selectively adding detail where needed.

Small additions to the scene, such as the stolen kitchen utensils clutched in the Mothman's talons, lend some context to what is taking place. While the ethereal feathers and emaciated limbs initially portray a frightening appearance, the creature also has a scrawny and inquisitive look about it, added to by the more downy-like feathers around its ankles. Besides, something that sneaks around stealing napkins is hardly something to fear.



Key facts

Name: Mothman

Taxonomy: Bird

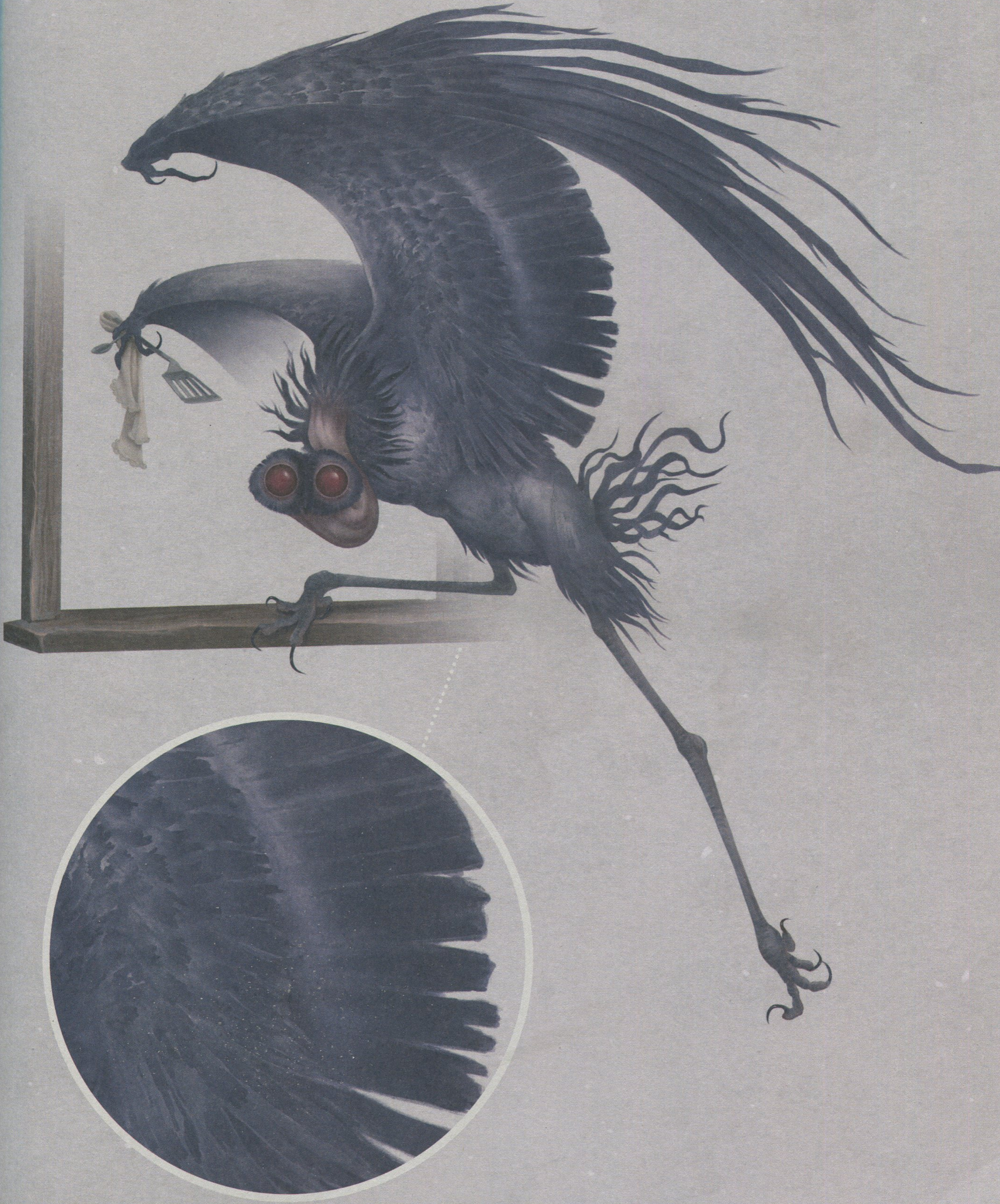
Region: North America

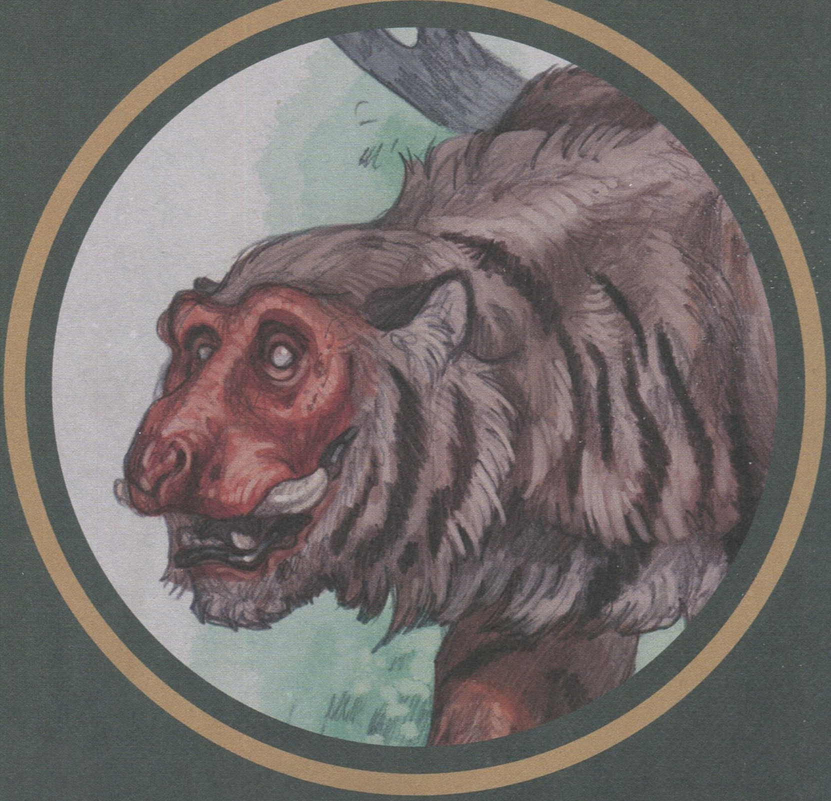
Habitat: Forests, towns, cities

Mythical abilities: Portends misfortune

Threat to humans: 1

Final image © Kristina Lexova





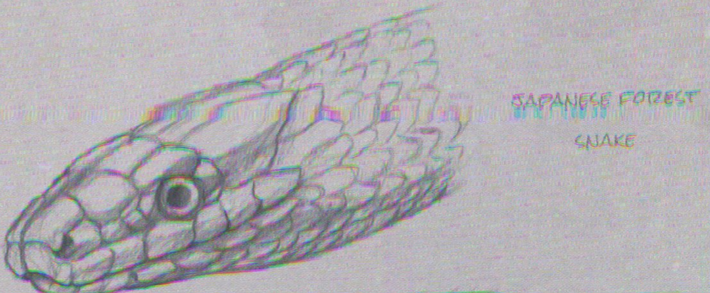
• NUE •

The nue is a legendary creature with origins in Japan. It fits into the categories of yōkai or mononoke, which are vengeful, supernatural monsters or spirit-like creatures. The nue shows up in an epic twelfth-century account known as *The Tale of the Heike* and is described as having the face of a monkey with the body of a Japanese raccoon dog. Its legs are said to be that of a tiger's, and the tail is depicted as a snake, sometimes with a snake's head at the end. In some accounts it has even been said to have the body of a rooster. Due to its appearance, it is often described as a Japanese Chimera. The nue is known for the eerie cries it makes at night. They often bring sickness, misfortune, and darkness wherever they appear. They even have the ability to turn into dark smoke and fly around the forests they inhabit.

• BRYNN METHENEY •

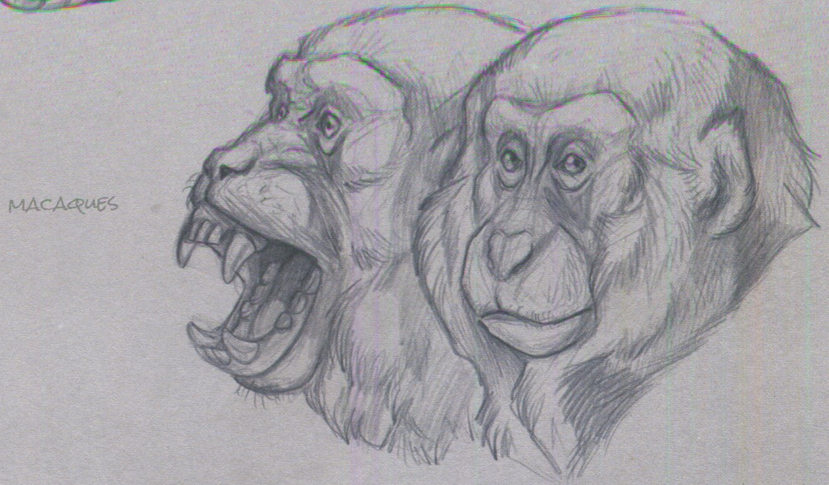
Concept artist • brynnart.com

• FIELD NOTES •



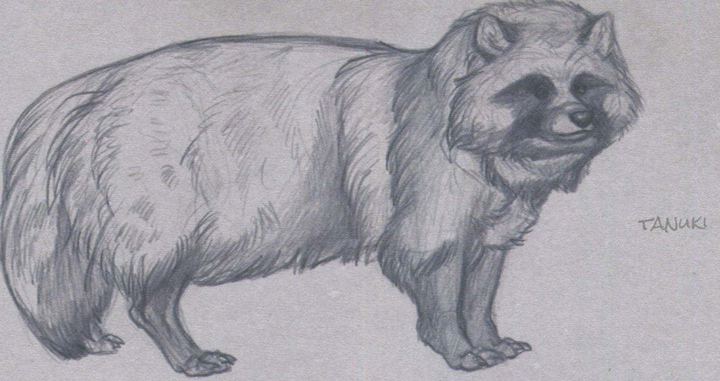
Snakes

Taking each of the different animal elements that form the nue in turn, I begin with snakes. The Japanese forest snake exhibits really beautiful scales and patterning, and I therefore study this snake's head. I like the way the scales of the face interlock, and could use this feature in the nue as I move forward into the design phase.



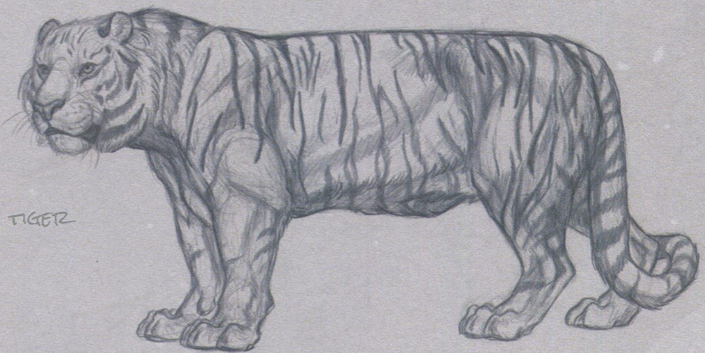
Macaques

I also study macaques; they are Japan's most well-known primates. I pay attention to how the mouth and the eyes interact with each other when the monkeys snarl or open their mouths. As I sketch I pay close attention to how soft the fur is around the face and head. The eyes are also very expressive and carry an implied intelligence.



Tanuki

The Japanese raccoon dog, or tanuki, makes up the body of the nue. I look at the tanuki to get a sense of its posture and volumes. The fur toward the back of the body of the tanuki is long and coarse looking; it could almost be compared to rooster feathers. I will make a note of this as a design element.



Tiger

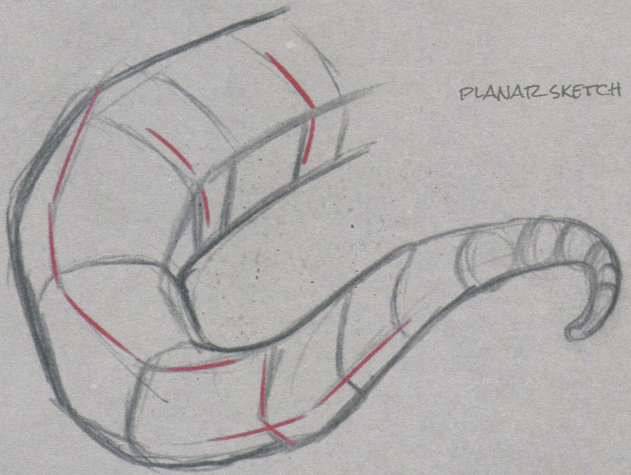
The legs of the nue are those of a tiger, which are very powerful and agile. As I sketch a tiger, I note just how long its body is and how bulky its legs are. These legs are great for pouncing and grabbing prey. While I like the legs of this tiger, I might design the paws of my nue somewhere between all of the mammals I have drawn for research, in order to add to the mythical element.

Snake tail

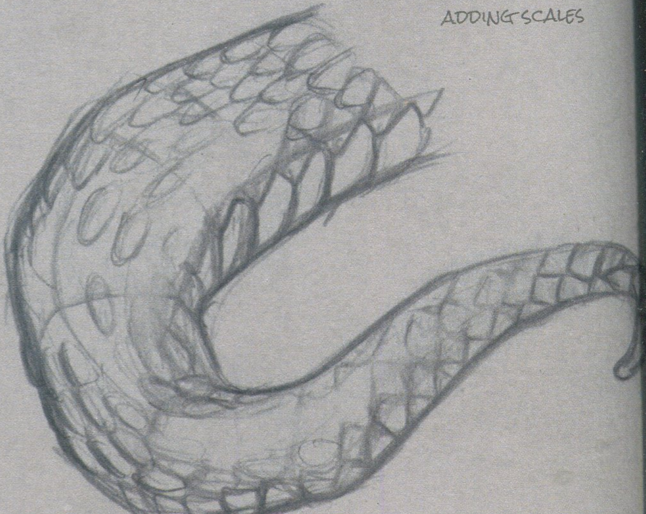
As mentioned, the nue has the tail of a snake, which I sketch roughly in a planar view. This means that I break the tail into simple planes and shapes to better depict its volumes and perspective. Using a planar view helps to prevent drawings from looking too flat.

Next I begin to round out the drawing. I use a kneaded eraser to knock back those planar lines. I draw in the scales along the bottom of the tail, being careful not to make the scales around the rest of the tail look too repetitive or crowded. This helps make the tail look more like a three-dimensional object.

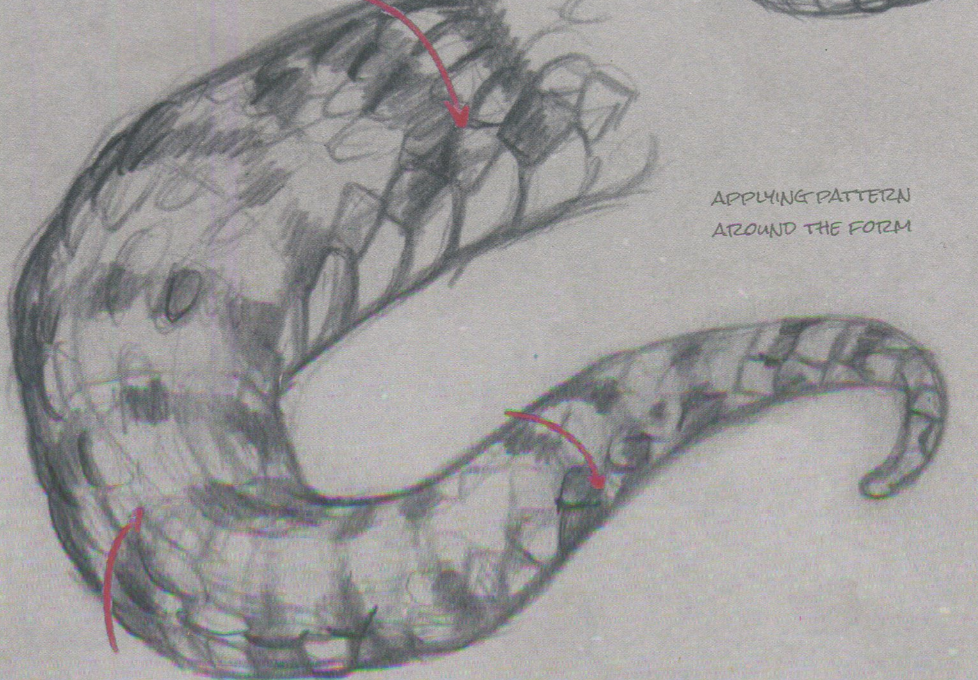
Now I can begin to add markings. The Japanese forest snake has very distinct markings along its body, and I am interested in capturing this. As I draw the markings, I make sure I remember that the tail is essentially a tube and that the markings must look as though they are traveling *around* the form. This will help ensure my nue tail looks three-dimensional.



PLANAR SKETCH



ADDING SCALES



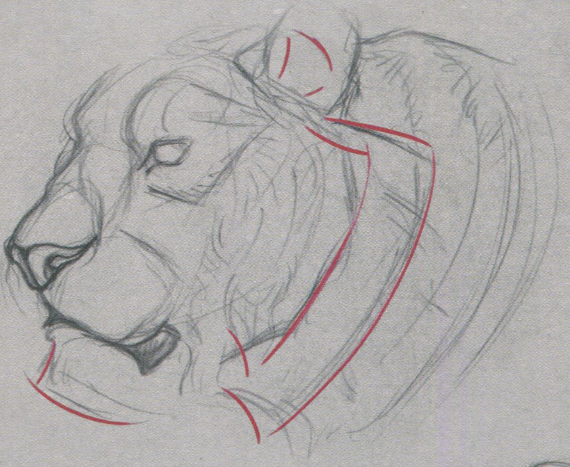
APPLYING PATTERN
AROUND THE FORM

Tiger fur

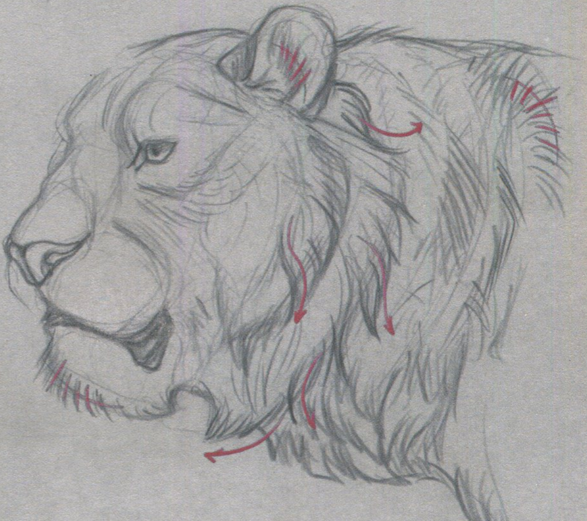
When drawing the tiger fur, I think about the bigger shapes first before I worry about details. This way I can give the fur a natural look in the way it is layered on the nue's body. The fur around the tiger's face is layered in big crescent-like shapes that move away from the nose.

Next, I move to the fur itself. Using the crescents as a guide, I make irregular squiggly lines in groups of fur going away from the face. It is important that I avoid making it repetitive, so I try to keep the fur direction as random as possible. Pencil weight helps make the spaces between groups darker to show depth and volume.

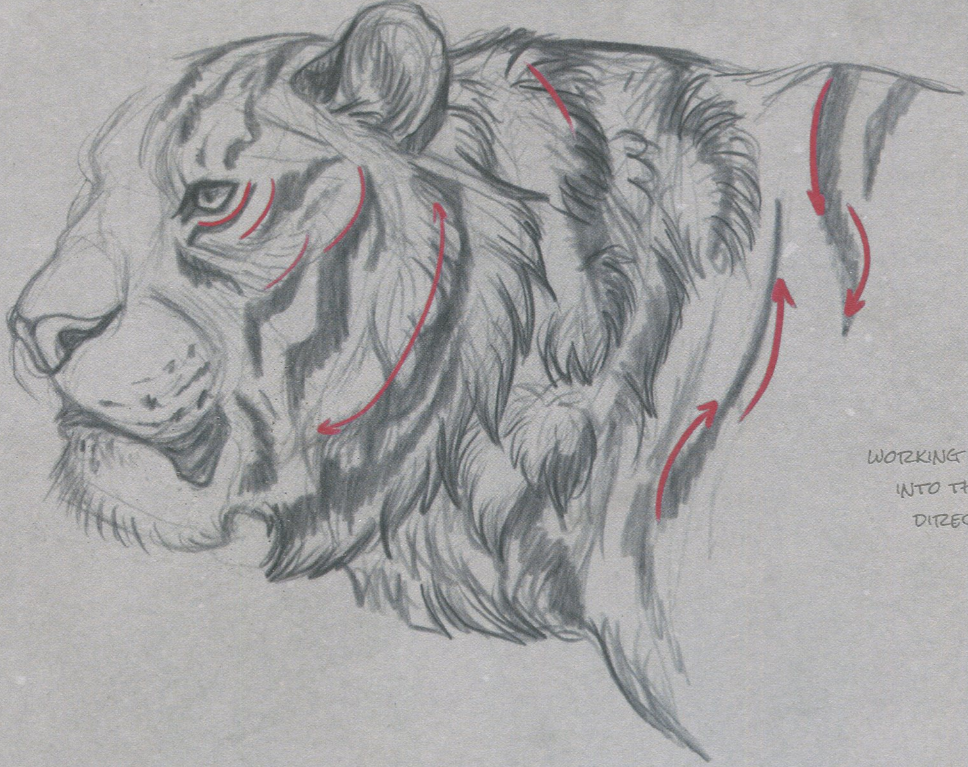
Finally, I draw the tiger's markings. These markings are similar to the snake's in that I want to make sure they feel random and follow the form of the tiger's body underneath. I constantly think about how the markings would be situated on the fur, working to make sure they have irregular edges. I use pencil weight here again to show markings that are darker and markings that are lighter in regards to lighting and form.



USING CRESCENT SHAPES



ADDING DIRECTION WITH DEPTH AND VOLUME



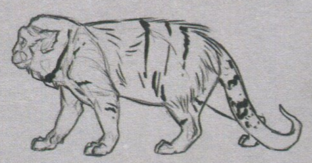
WORKING PATTERN INTO THE FUR DIRECTION

• DESIGN PROCESS •

Thumbnails

In my thumbnails I explored lots of different proportions and postures. These elements can tell us a lot about a creature or character. I also experimented with different ways of integrating the mix of creatures. I started with a more monkey-like body and moved into more tiger-like proportions. These two directions produce a different personality: the tiger-inspired bodies look more agile and predatory, while the monkey-inspired bodies look more lanky and slow.

The face is also important. The faces with more scales and longer mouths look more sinister and creepy, which fits in well with nue folklore. However, I also want to keep the "monkey face" very much apparent. Pulling the mouth far back like that of a snake will prevent the monkey face from looking too bland. I explore the top-front incisor teeth being turned upward like tusks to give the beast a more mythical look.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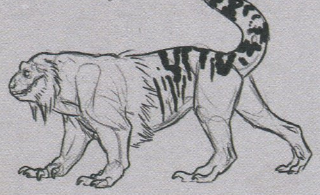
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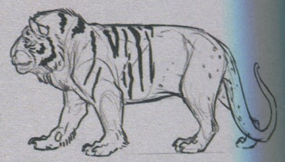
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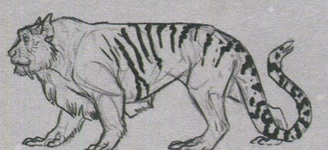
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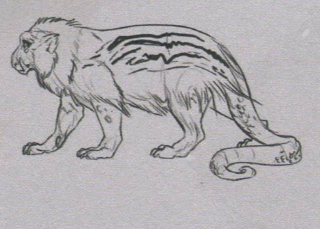
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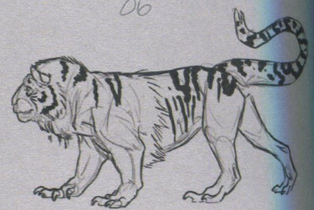
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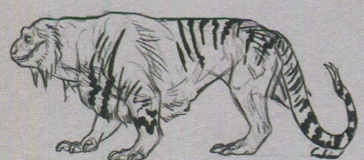
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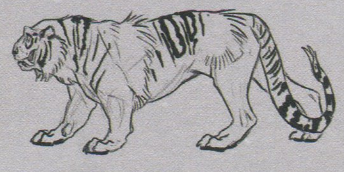
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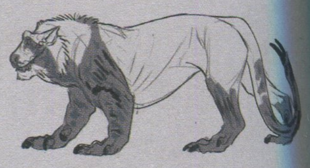
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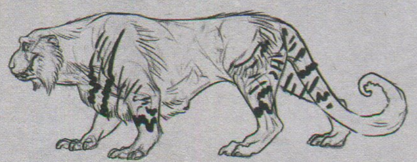
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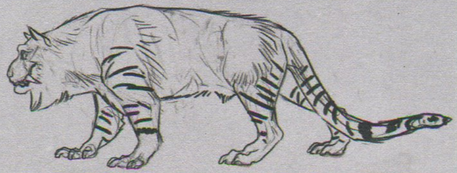
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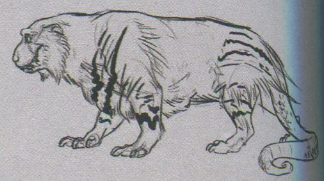
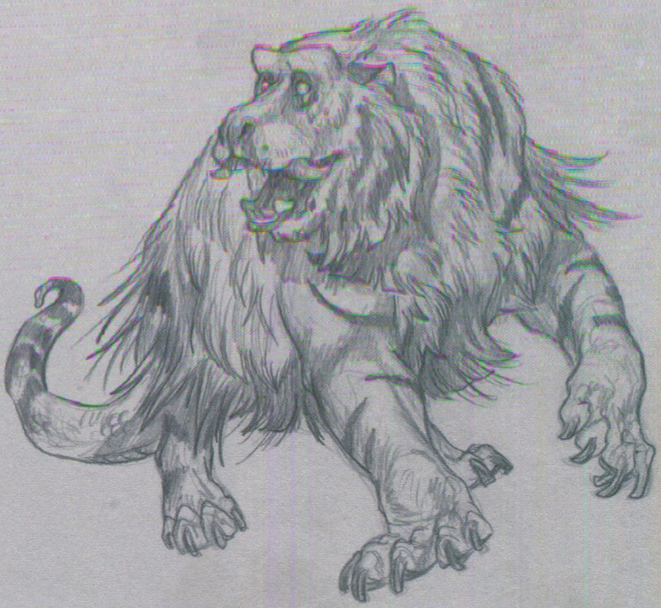

12

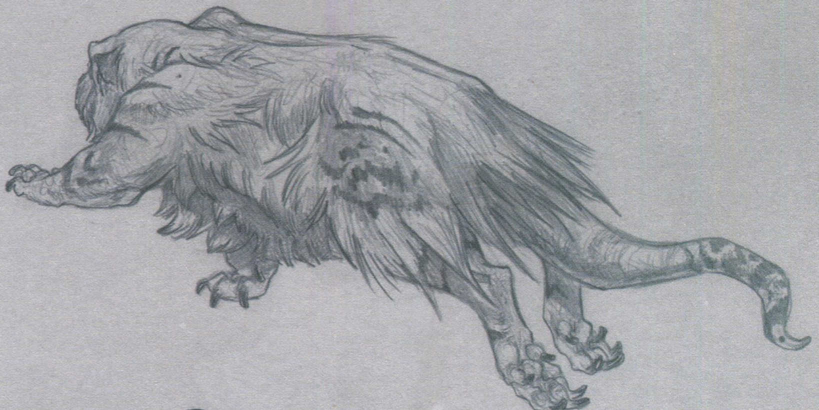
Further exploration

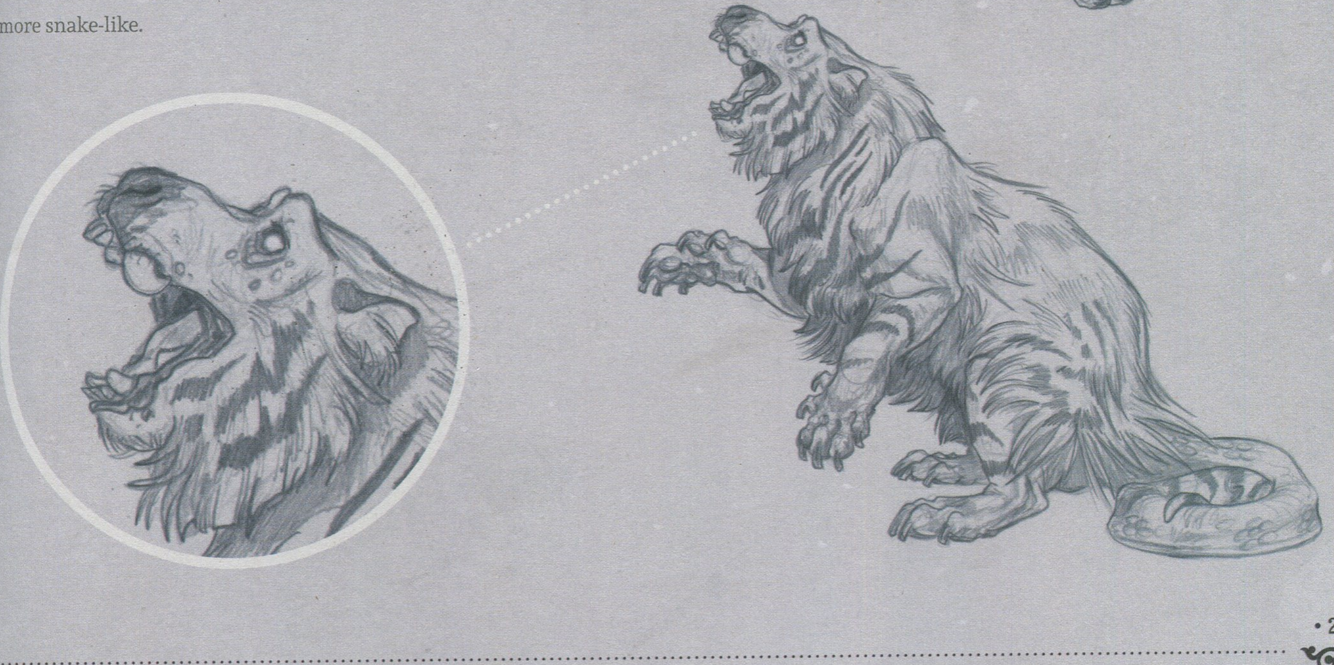
I chose to move forward with a concept that incorporated protruding teeth, large paws, and heavy fur, while maintaining the monkey face and snake tail. A front view of the nue shows it looking up as it stalks along. You can see the strength in its front paws, and the fur around the neck and shoulders gives it a more powerful, almost lion-like appearance. A lot of overlapping of shapes and anatomy research was required for this. I opened the mouth so that the viewer is able to get a good look inside. This also helps the nue look natural. The tail is held low with a slight upturn at the end to show some cautious curiosity.

Sketching the beast running from behind allowed me to visualize the creature in action and develop the bottom of the feet more. The sharp, predatory claws are more obvious here, and the snake tail also becomes more apparent. I tried to avoid making the snake tail too thin in order to maintain a more powerful look, even from behind.

Drawing the creature from a sitting side view meant I could really get a feel for how it would move around and act. Perhaps this nue is calling up toward someone or something, or even just calling out into the forest. This is a good opportunity to show weight in the legs and the tail. I coiled the tail to make it look more snake-like.



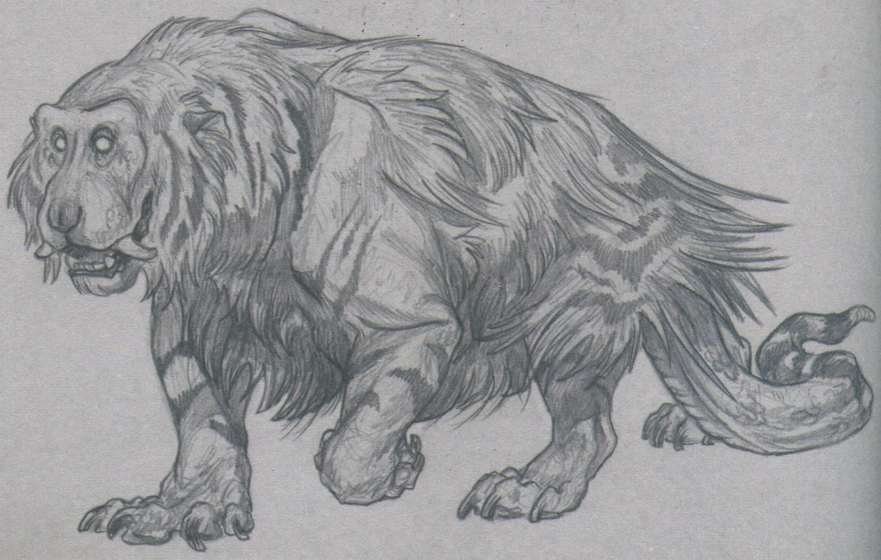


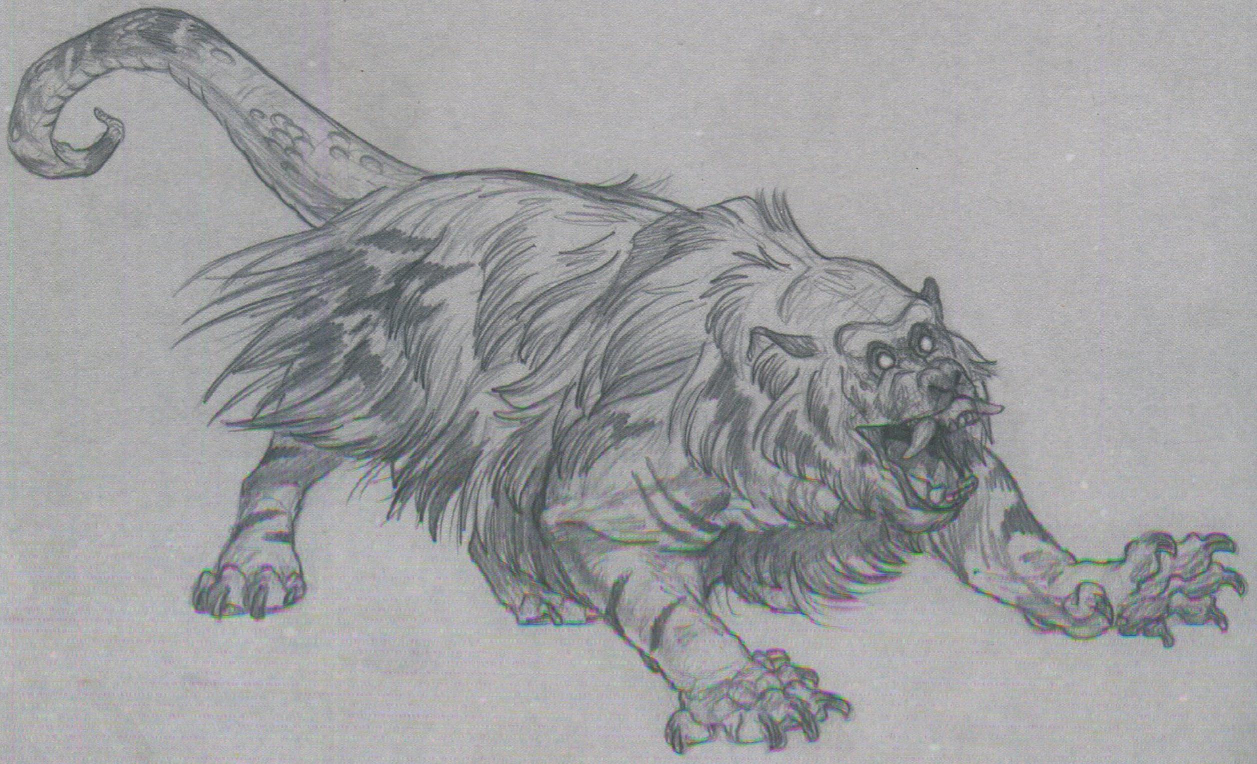


Poses

The first pose shown here is borderline friendly, but it could also be seen as sly. Perhaps the nue is talking to a weary traveler who is frightened. I used footage of tigers to capture the weight in the forearms to make sure it appeared realistic. Keeping the tail low and slithery prevents the creature from looking too friendly and more sinister.

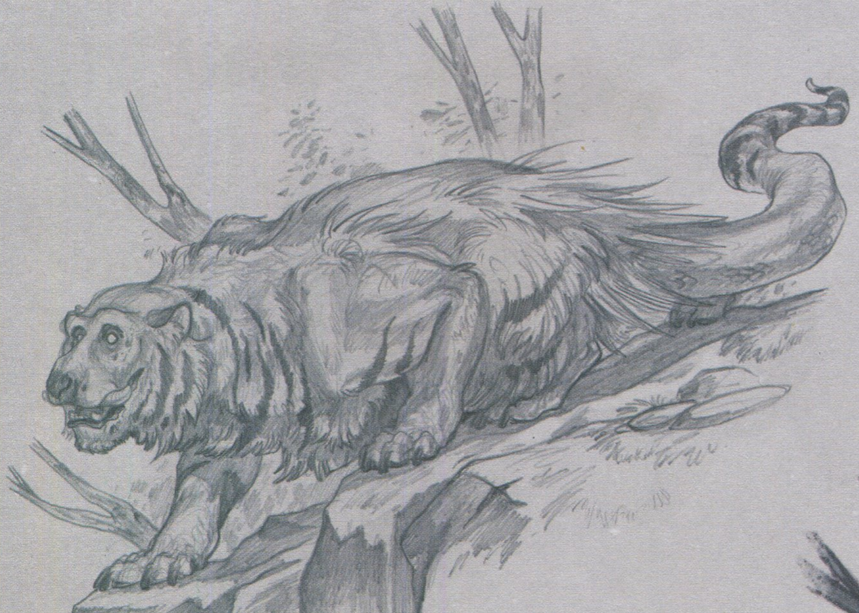
The nue is considered to be an evil creature hunted by brave warriors. The pose below shows the nue in attack mode. I used footage of monkeys to understand how the face would appear when snarling. I peeled back the top lip to make sure the teeth could be seen clearly. A lot of animals move their top lip like this as a sign of intimidation. I kept the pose solid in the back legs as a sign of strength and power, with one of the front legs reaching forward for the victim.

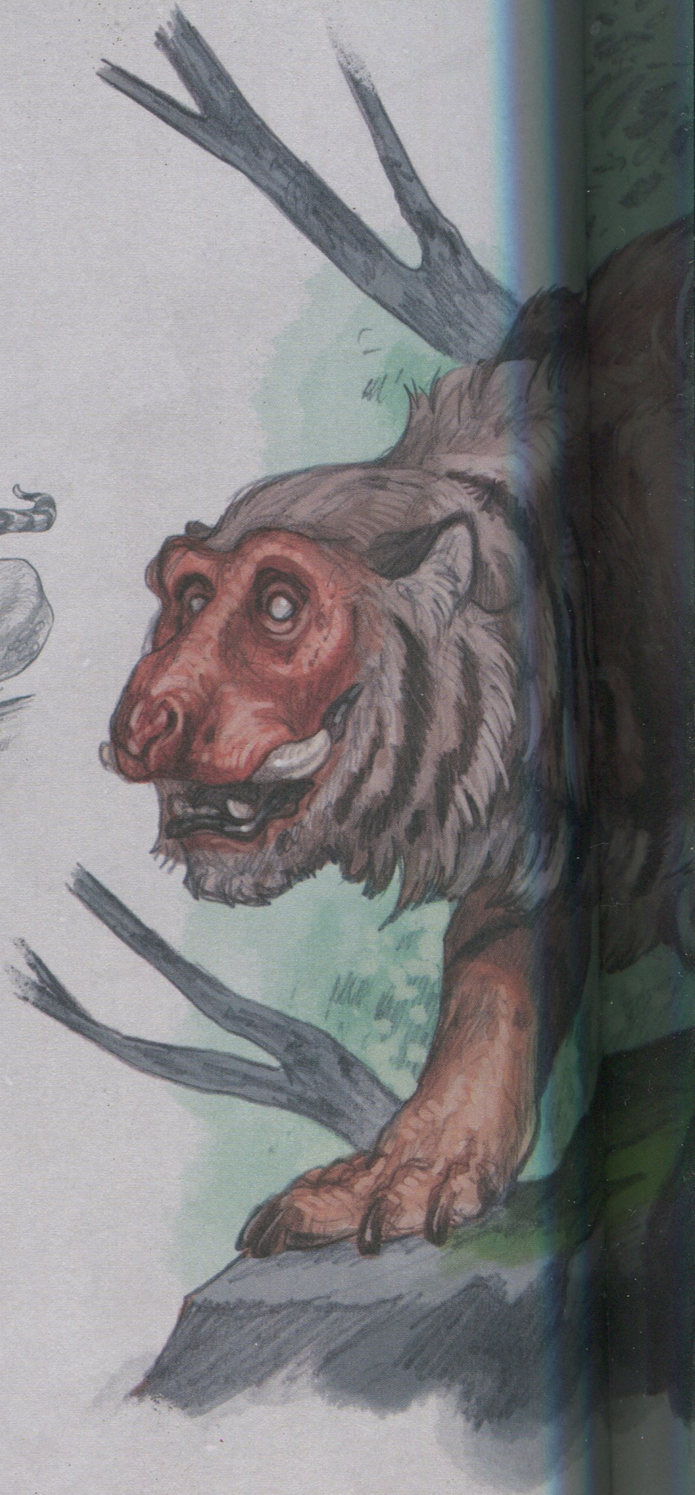




• FINAL DESIGN •

The final design presents the nue stalking through its forest home. I kept the face neutral but opened the mouth in order to make it look as though it could be panting. The stalking pose appears quite eerie, with the nue's head hanging low and the tail slithering behind. I kept the texture and pattern relatively true to each animal referenced for the design so that it is clear that the nue is comprised of different creatures. I ensured the face was red as I wanted it to be striking and even alarming. The legs and body are shades of brown like the tiger and raccoon dog, and the tail is red like the Japanese forest snake. The markings are sparse but present along the tail and sides of the nue. I chose to keep the eyes white and milky, which helps to give the creature a more supernatural look since it is a spirit of misfortune.

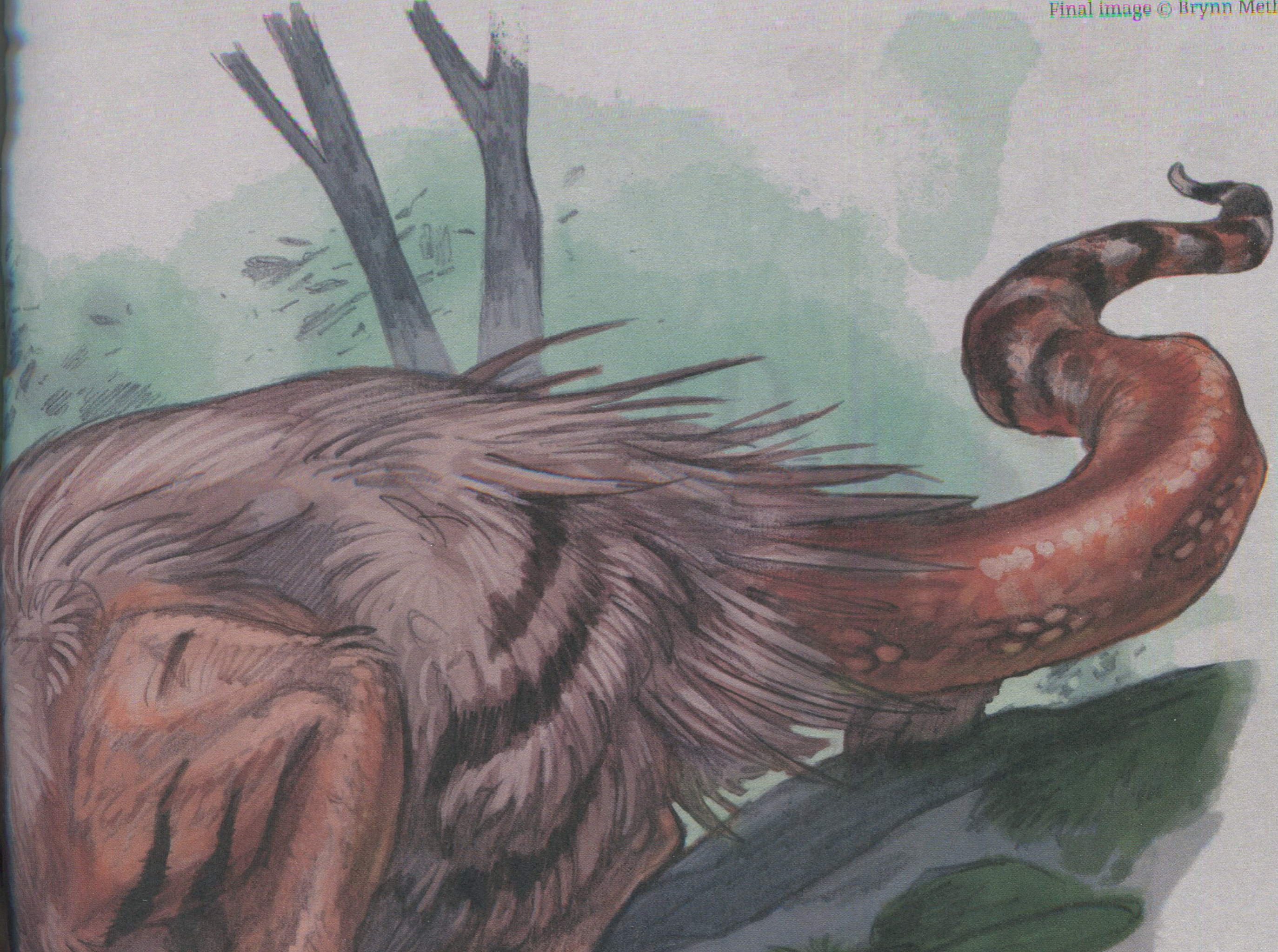


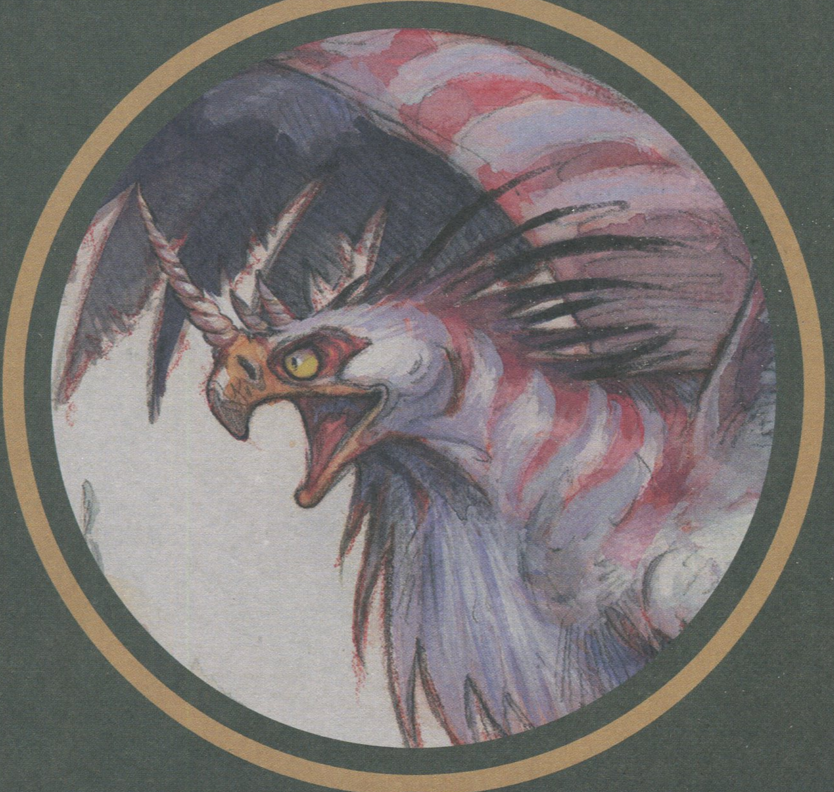


Key facts

Name: Nue
Taxonomy: Monkey, tiger, tanuki, snake
Region: Japan
Habitat: Forests
Mythical abilities: Can turn into smoke, brings misfortune
Threat to humans: 3

Final image © Brynn Metheney





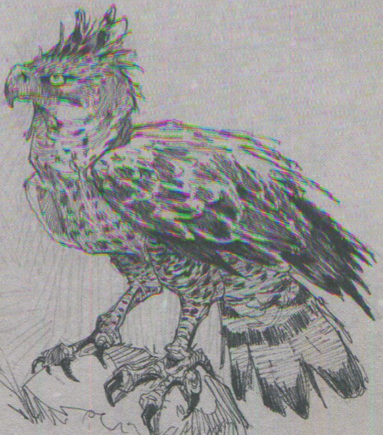
• PHOENIX •

The phoenix is a powerful yet elusive creature, commonly depicted in Greek and Roman mythology. It is well known for its astonishing ability to cyclically reincarnate itself. In its seniority, the phoenix will burst into flames before majestically rising from its own ashes as a new, fledgling bird. Essentially, this allows the phoenix to be immortal. Commonly associated with the sun, the phoenix has roots that trace as far back as ancient Egypt, where it was venerated as a symbol of life and death. In ancient times, the phoenix was pictured with vibrant red and blue plumage, similar to a peacock. It stands about as tall as an eagle, with massive, widespread wings and striking eyes. Its golden talons are known to be incredibly strong and robust, capable of lifting creatures nearly twice its size. The phoenix is a remarkable creature that embodies personal transformation and new beginnings.

• NITYANSHU •

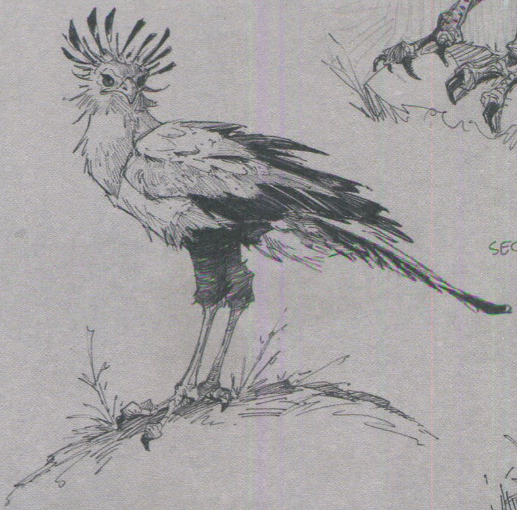
Illustrator • nityanshu.com

• FIELD NOTES •



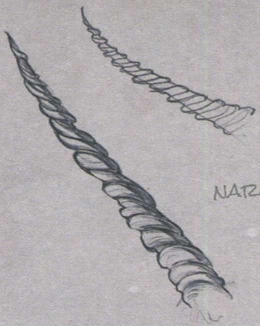
African crowned eagle

When I try to conceptualize a phoenix, an eagle comes to mind as the main reference point for its shape, size, and personality. Specifically, the African crowned eagle seems like a good fit. It carries an almost majestic quality due to the arrangement of feathers on its head, which seems to closely resemble a royal crown. The phoenix shares another characteristic with the African crowned eagle: both birds have incredibly strong and enormous feet that have a powerful grip.



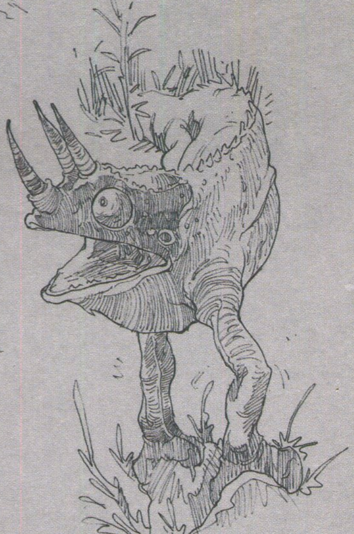
Secretary bird

The secretary bird, an African native, is another great reference point when designing the phoenix. This is due to the beautiful display of long, horizontal feathers sitting on its back, splayed out in a way that is reminiscent of a blazing fire and the symbolism commonly associated with the phoenix. The balance of dark and light shapes across the secretary bird is very harmonious and pleasing to the eye. Because its head shape is similar to an eagle, I can easily combine the shapes of the two birds without it looking unnatural or outlandish. This is key to designing a believable creature.



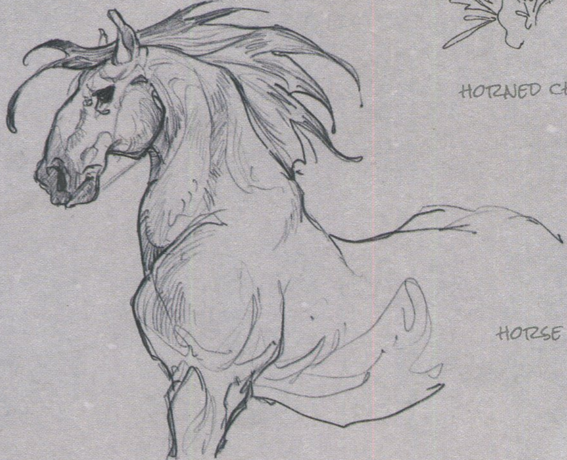
Narwhal tusk

Adding a narwhal tusk would give the phoenix a great element of strength and an innate mechanism for self-defense. It would also accentuate the otherworldly nature of the phoenix and keep it well within the realm of myth and fantasy. Because I am specifically designing a phoenix and not just a common bird, it is important to include other distinctive features, such as a narwhal tusk, in order to clearly differentiate the phoenix from real-world birds.



Horned chameleon

In order to make the narwhal horn blend in more naturally with other shapes I will use for the phoenix, I want to give the beast two smaller horns on its head as well, a characteristic that is similar to a dinosaur. Besides birds, reptiles are another close relative to dinosaurs. The three large horns of the horned chameleon create a great balance and look really interesting as a graphical shape.



Horse fur

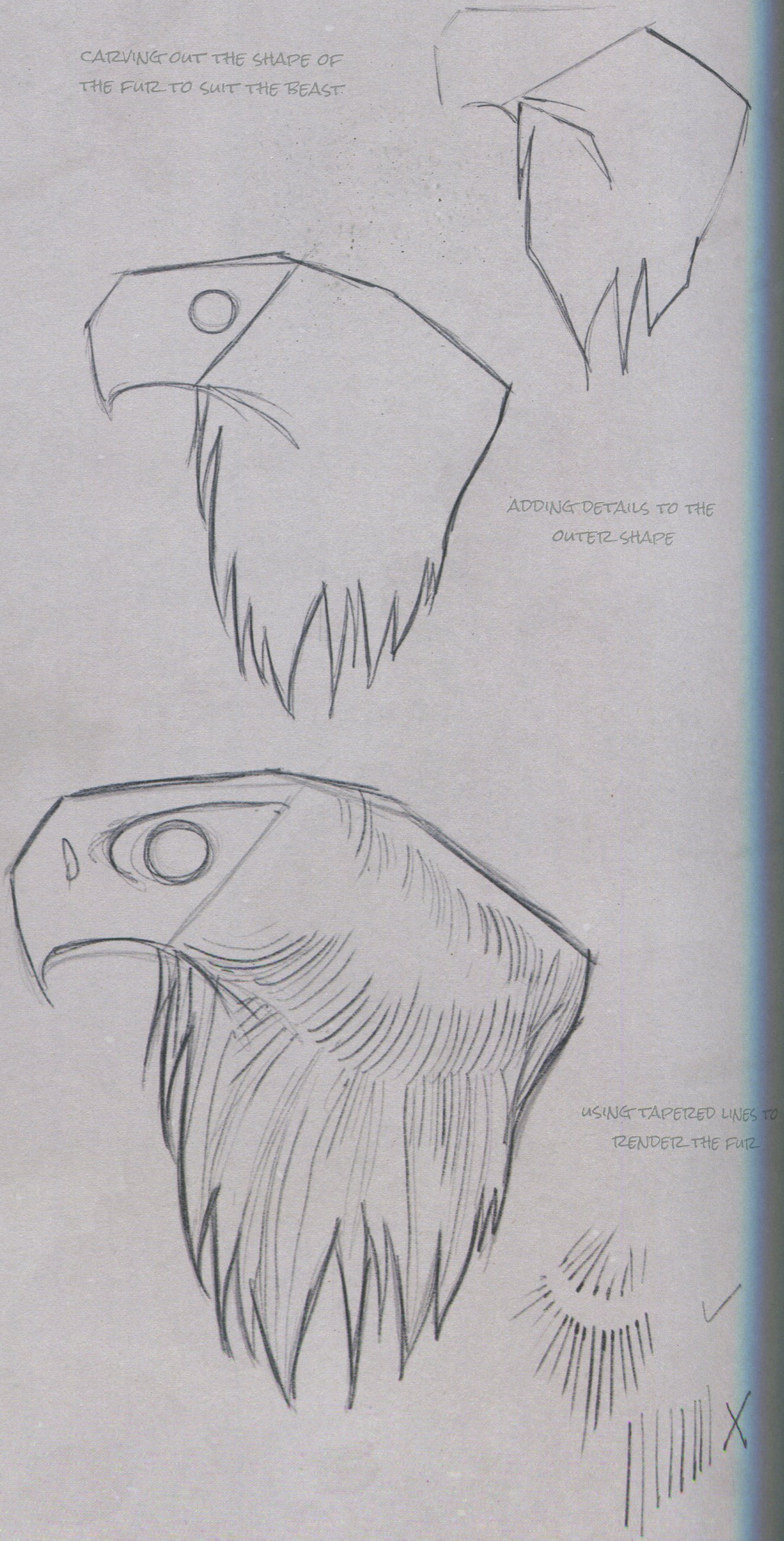
Incorporating the fur or mane of a horse on certain areas of the phoenix will further push the fantastical element and make for an incredibly unique design. Again, this is to pull the phoenix away from traditional birds and give it a supernatural quality. Radiant, silver horse fur will work particularly well because this is an uncommon characteristic that will add to the elegance and grandeur of the phoenix.

Horse fur

To create horse fur on the bird, I start out with the basic shape of the hair before adding any specific details or individual pieces. At this stage, it should look like a single large mass. I construct this single shape as I want the overall design of the horse fur to look. I keep in mind that at this point, it still needs to have a graphic quality with no inner details. I am simply carving out the shape so that it is appealing and suits the creature. It should follow the form of the frame it is sitting on. For example if the horse fur is attached to the neck, it should sit along the shape of the neck to look more credible.

I then begin to break up that large shape. Essentially I am molding a more specific version of what I had previously. Adding distinct details to the outer shape makes the concept much more authentic. Doing this step by step gives the horse fur movement and believability without it looking disorganized or messy. I try to keep the shape as clear and appealing as possible. I again keep an eye on where the horse fur falls to ensure that it flows smoothly with the form of the animal, creating a natural look.

Finally, I begin rendering the texture of the hair. I create long, sweeping lines within the shape I previously carved to resemble the flowing fur of a horse. Remember to follow the shape and form of the animal and the part of the body that the fur is sitting on. In this case, since the fur is silky and smooth, I avoid cross-hatching or blunt lines, as this will make the fur look rough or patchy. Rather, the lines should taper smoothly. This means that they are thicker at the root and thinner towards the end of the strand. To imitate the light that reflects over horse fur, I maintain a horizontal negative space that indicates shine.



CARVING OUT THE SHAPE OF THE FUR TO SUIT THE BEAST

ADDING DETAILS TO THE OUTER SHAPE

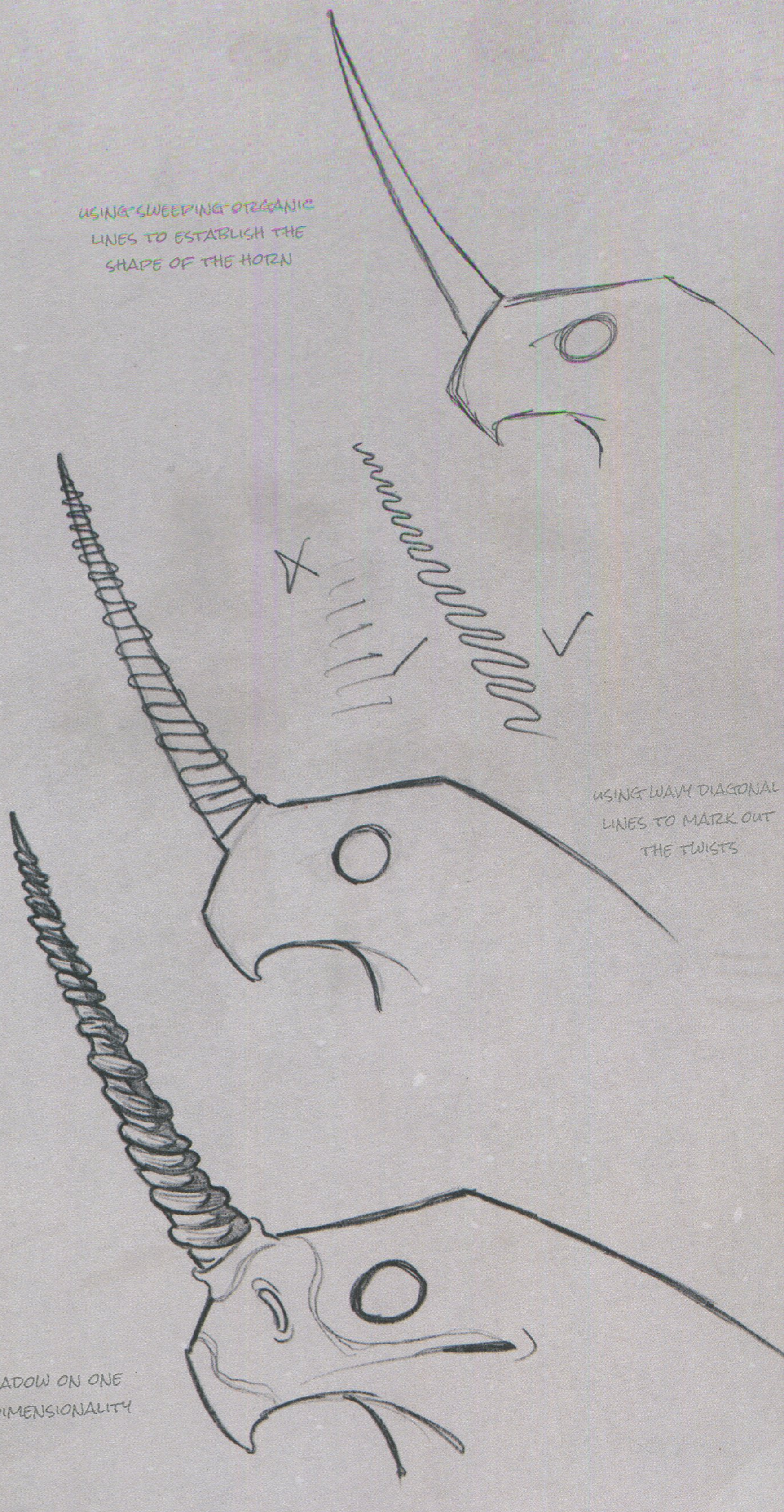
USING TAPERED LINES TO RENDER THE FUR

Narwhal horn

To draw a narwhal horn, I first create a long, pointed shape, keeping the lines slightly uneven and organic rather than geometric and straight. This is to ensure that the narwhal horn will look natural and realistic. It is important to keep in mind the proportions of the design and not make the horn too large or small relative to the size of the animal. This is once again to ensure that the overall shape is believable and doesn't look out of place or awkward. In this case, I place the narwhal horn on the beak of the phoenix, and adjust the size of the horn according to the design of the entire body.

I then begin to mold the specific features of the horn. Narwhal horns tend to have a helical structure similar to the threads of a screw. I create wavy diagonal lines across the cone structure to resemble the twist of the horn, again making sure these lines are organic. I try not to make them too symmetrical or evenly distributed. They should look natural. Towards the point of the horn, the diagonal lines are narrower and sit closer together.

Finally, I return to the outer line of the narwhal horn and redraw the outline to accommodate the wavy, diagonal inner shapes I created. At this stage, it almost looks like a wavy noodle wrapped around a chopstick. The purpose here is to turn the flat, outer line drawing of the horn into a believable, three-dimensional shape. In order to show texture and form, I add shadows to one side of the horn. This accentuates the helical structure. I again try to keep everything organic and natural, and avoid making the horn seem overly constructed.



USING SWEEPING ORGANIC LINES TO ESTABLISH THE SHAPE OF THE HORN

USING WAVY DIAGONAL LINES TO MARK OUT THE TWISTS

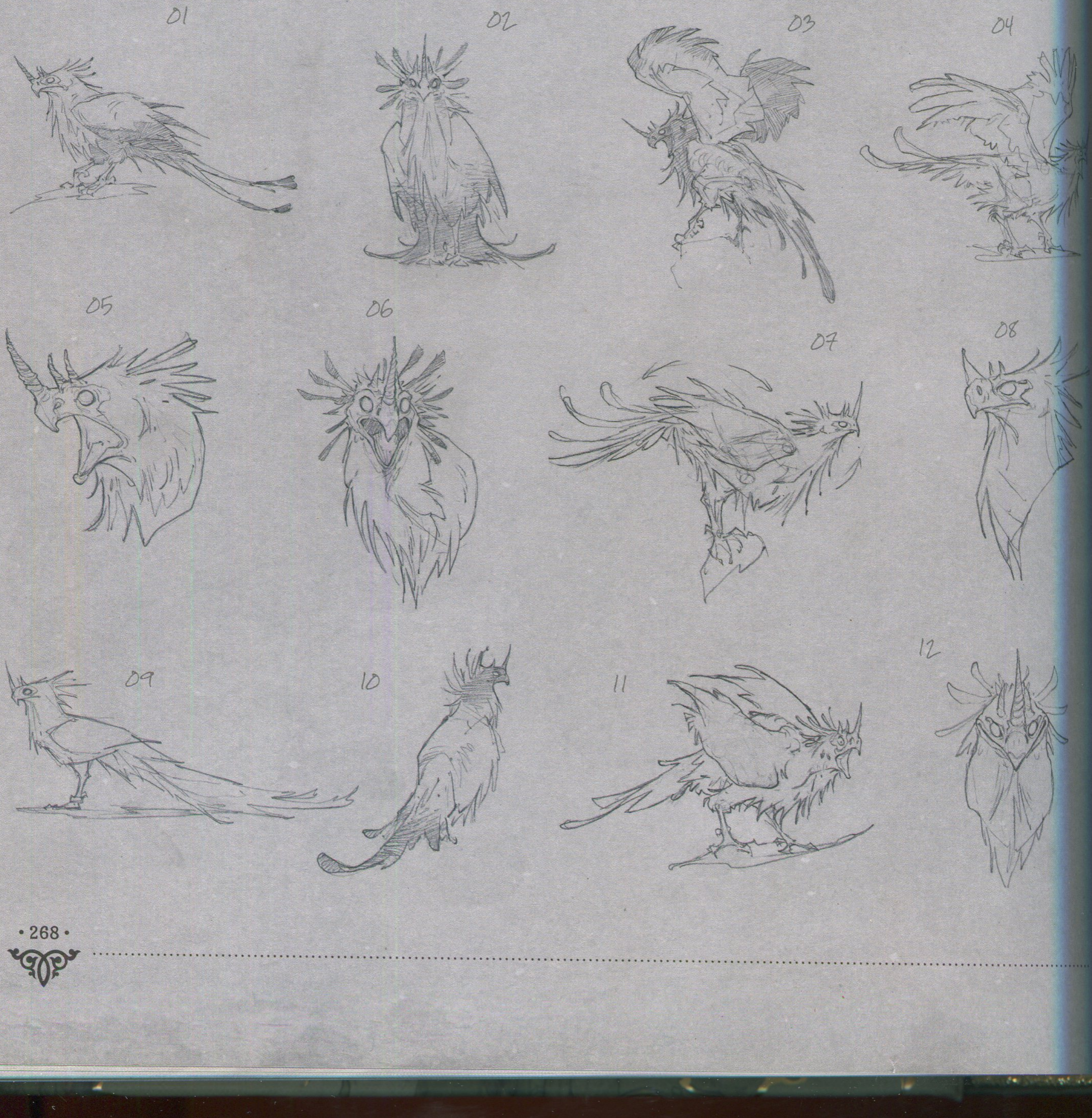
ADDING SHADOW ON ONE SIDE FOR DIMENSIONALITY

• DESIGN PROCESS •

Thumbnails

The thumbnails shown below explore various shapes and elements that are either accentuated or minimized. Some of the designs have very large feathers on the head which resemble a prominent crown, and other designs have a flat shape that minimizes the crown. I realized that the best option for the head of the phoenix would be one that creates a clear, graphical shape which is distinct and easily recognizable.

Experimenting with the plumage of the phoenix also gave me a good idea of how the overall shape of the design might end up. Some thumbnails feature downward-facing feathers that result in a very flowing, soft look. Although this is harmonious and beautiful, it lacks the power and strength that the phoenix is known for. Other thumbnails have erratic, large feathers that are full and flared out. This design aspect is interesting, but it loses the calm, composed nature that the phoenix is also known to have. The phoenix needs a design that carries the grace of the downward-facing feathers, yet still maintains the energy and power of the slightly flared-out plumage. In other words, choosing a middle ground between the two design elements seems to be the best choice in order to give the phoenix the specific personality and energy that I am looking for.

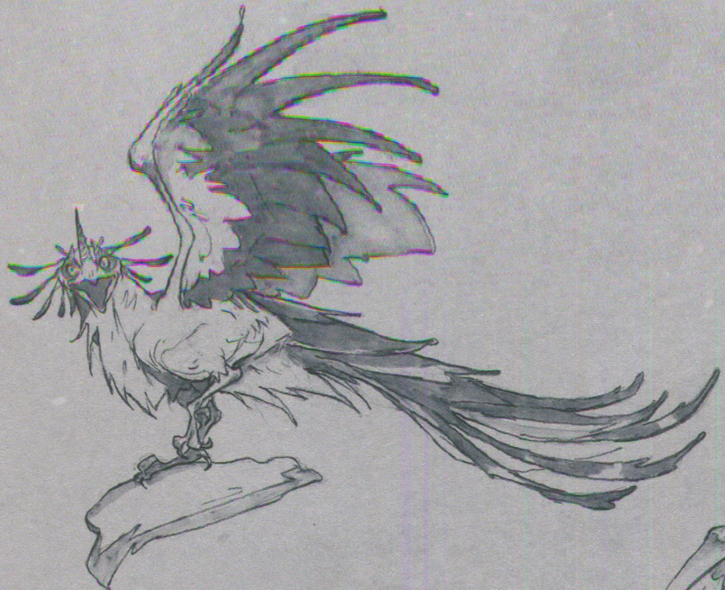


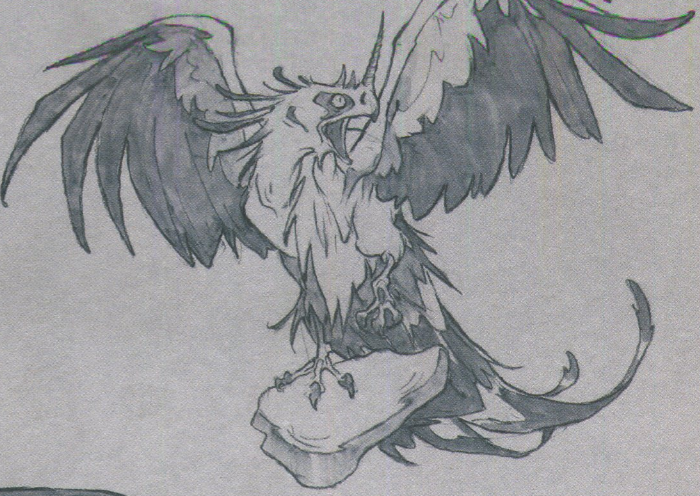
Further exploration

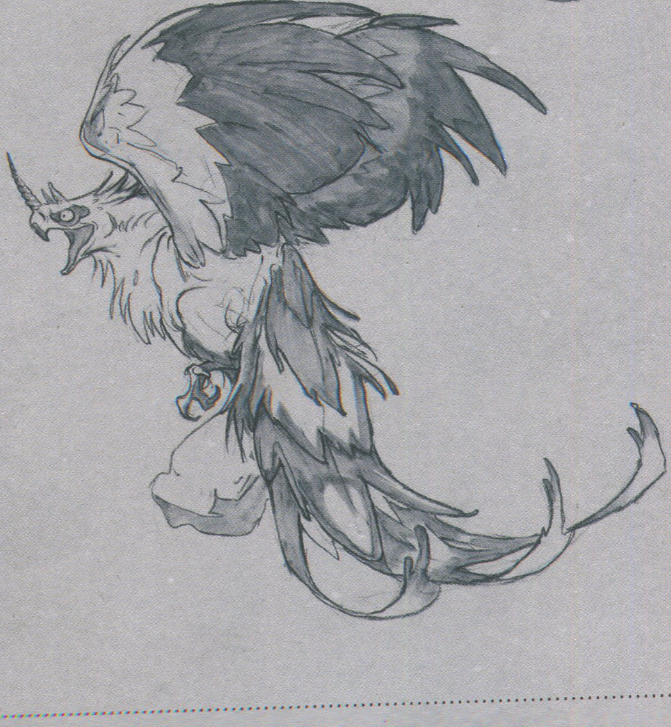
I really like the way the second thumbnail shows off the design of the phoenix, so I started to move forward with this one. After redrawing the same thumbnail from the side view, I feel that the overall design looks powerfully impressive. I like that the phoenix has large, expansive wings and bulky feet. This makes it look rugged and strong. The plumage is well balanced with the horse fur that hangs under the neck. This creates a flared-out design that resembles the flames for which the phoenix is renowned.

Viewing the phoenix from the front, the shape of the face looks extremely dynamic yet menacing at the same time. From the tip of the narwhal horn to the feathers on the tail, this design creates a very interesting C-shape, which is incredibly appealing. The only improvement I would like to carry out is to graphically separate the legs from the rest of the body, to make the design more clear and easy to read.

From the back the phoenix looks strong and powerful due to the proportions of its design. Again, the horse fur at the front and the large feathers on the back balance each other out very well. The narwhal horn is interesting from this view because it is a contrasting element that makes the phoenix closely resemble a dinosaur. Because the phoenix is an ancient creature, this works well for the design.

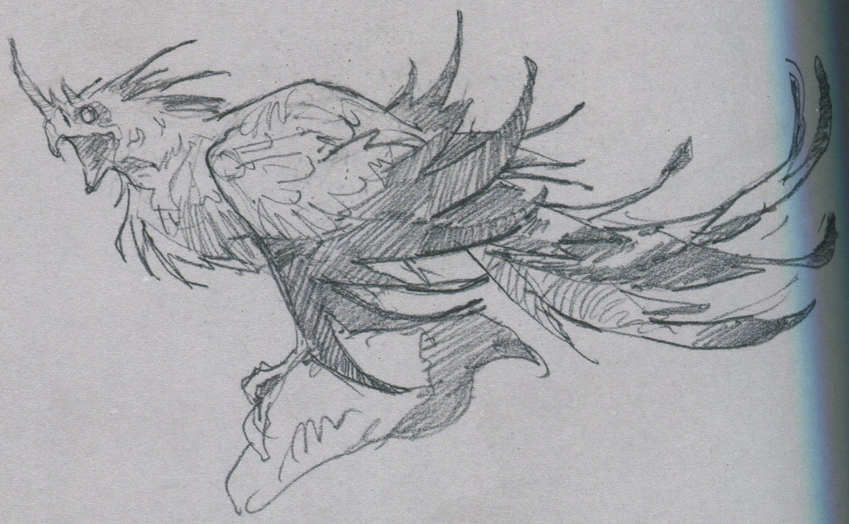




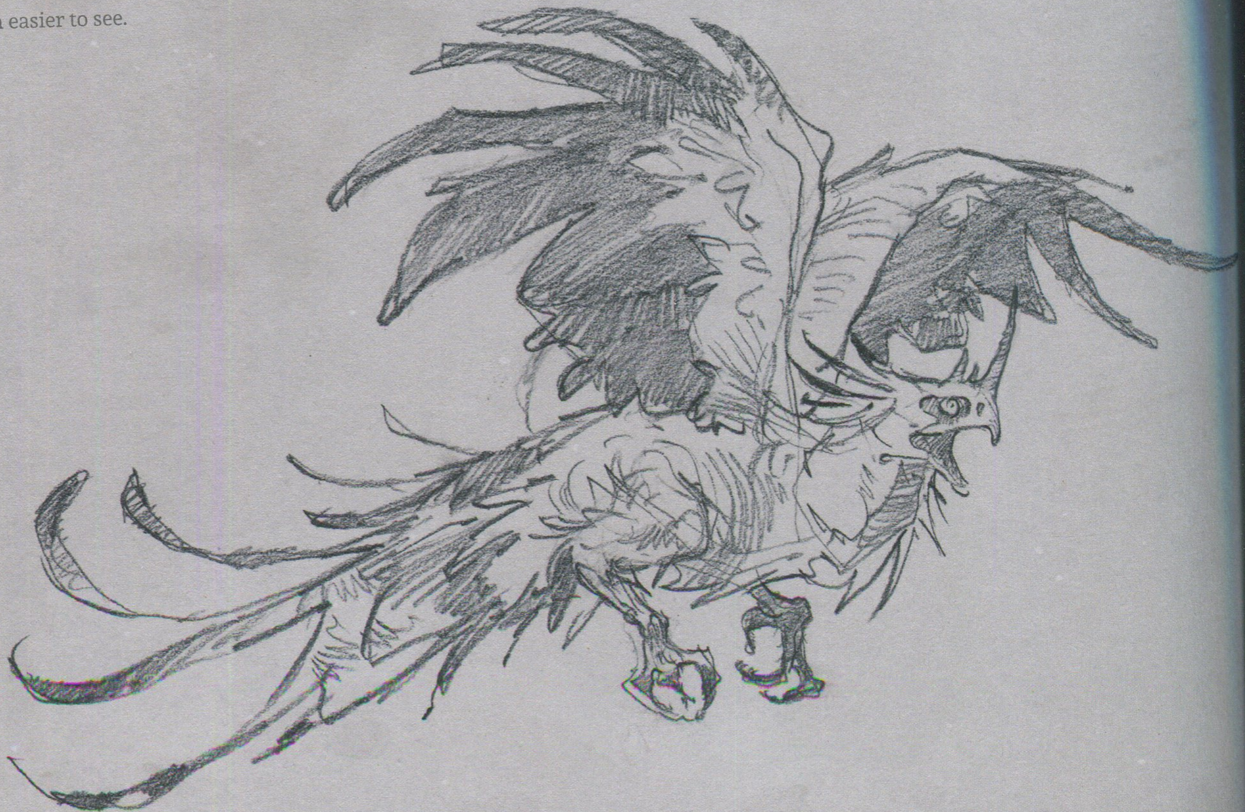


Poses

In the first pose shown here I decided to emphasize how the phoenix might beckon or call. The wings are pulled downwards rather than upwards to show the curvature of the back, demonstrating how the phoenix might balance over the top of a rocky terrain. This also helps to create a visually enticing shape. The sharp spikes that protrude all around the phoenix once again resemble the flames of a fire. Its fierce expression and stance show that it is a highly aware and intelligent bird, much like an eagle.



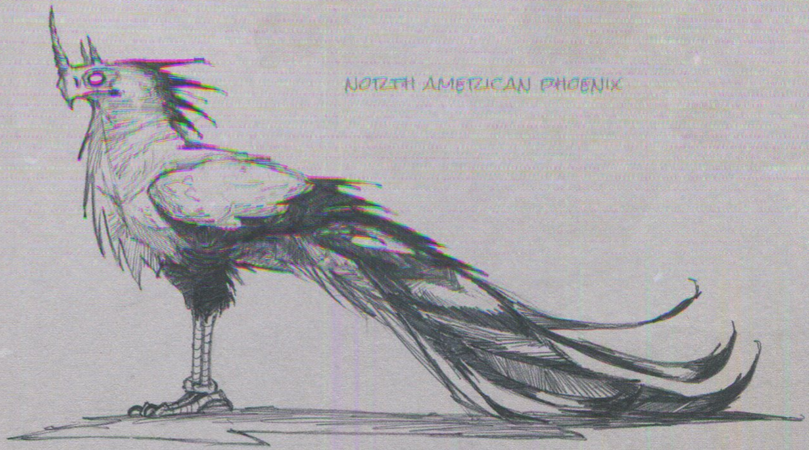
It is important to know how the phoenix will appear when it is flying. I wanted to make it look like a blazing ball of fire that exudes a dynamic and vibrant energy. The balance of dark and light shapes could be slightly improved to make the image easier to understand at first glance. For me, this is crucial to a great design. This is especially true around the upper leg structure. It could be fixed by simply darkening the legs, making them easier to see.



• SUBSPECIES •

North American phoenix

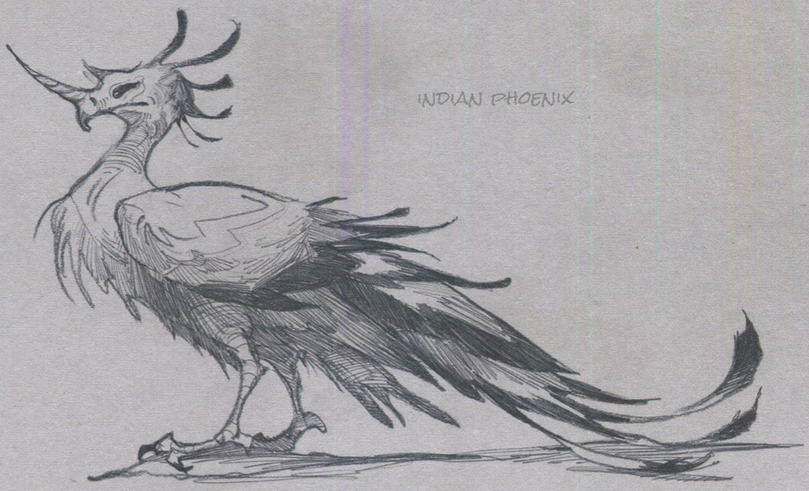
In different environments, animals adapt and change. This subspecies of phoenix is very similar to the common phoenix, but it has adapted to its North American habitat. The tail is still long and flared out, however the legs are much longer to account for the rugged terrain. As a result it often looks quite gaunt and slightly awkward – not quite as noble looking as its esteemed brother.



NORTH AMERICAN PHOENIX

Indian phoenix

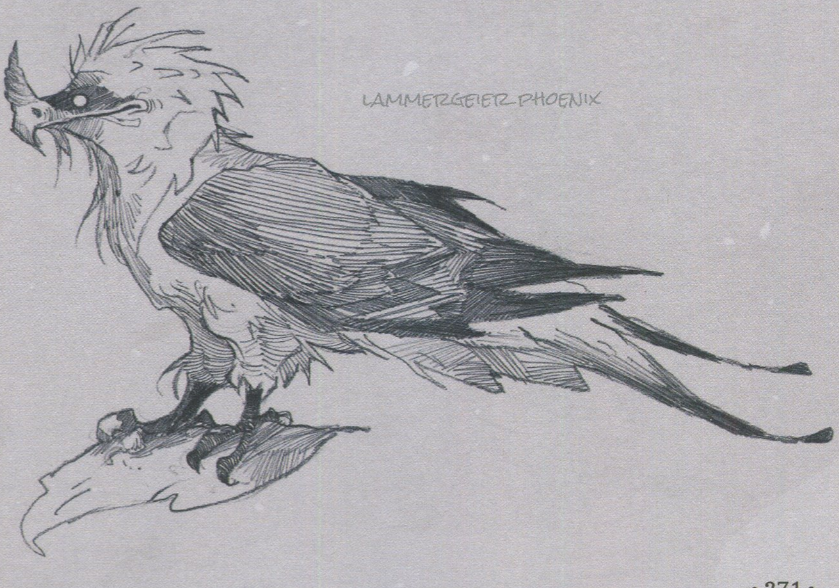
This subspecies has evolved in the Indian subcontinent. It closely resembles a peacock, which is a thriving bird in Asian countries. The flowing, soft plumage of this phoenix creates a graceful shape, which is very appealing. The head of the phoenix is more tapered and looks much less hardy than its common relation. It lacks the strength and power of the common phoenix, but it is impressive nonetheless with its graceful and dynamic design.



INDIAN PHOENIX

Lammergeier phoenix

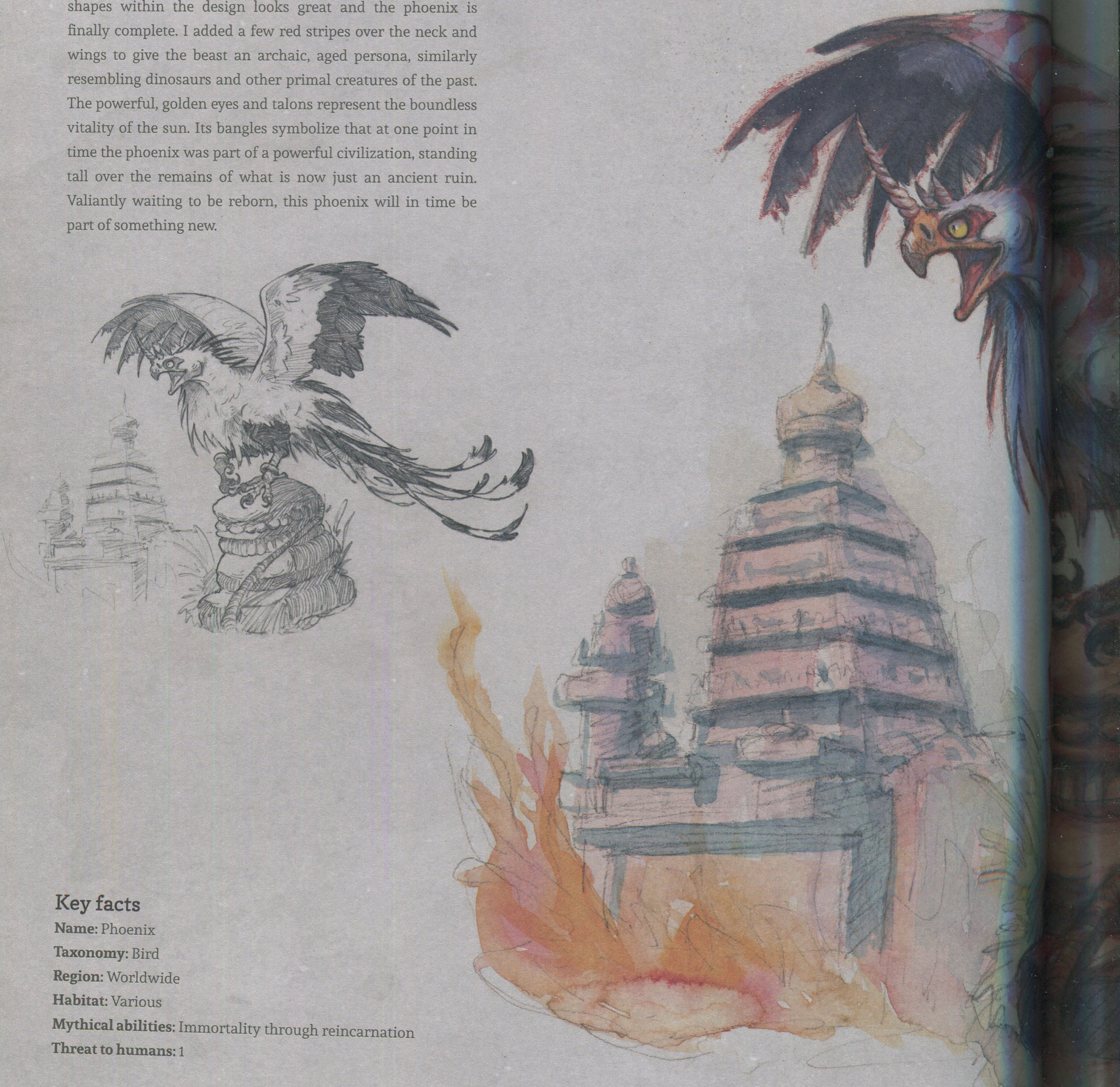
This phoenix is from Sub-Saharan Africa. It is believed to be closely related to the bearded vulture, which explains its intimidating and menacing appearance. It lacks the majesty and grace of other types of phoenix and looks quite vulgar, especially due to its bulky, large head and crooked beak. This phoenix is generally perceived as a villainous creature and is to be avoided if spotted.



LAMMERGEIER PHOENIX

• FINAL DESIGN •

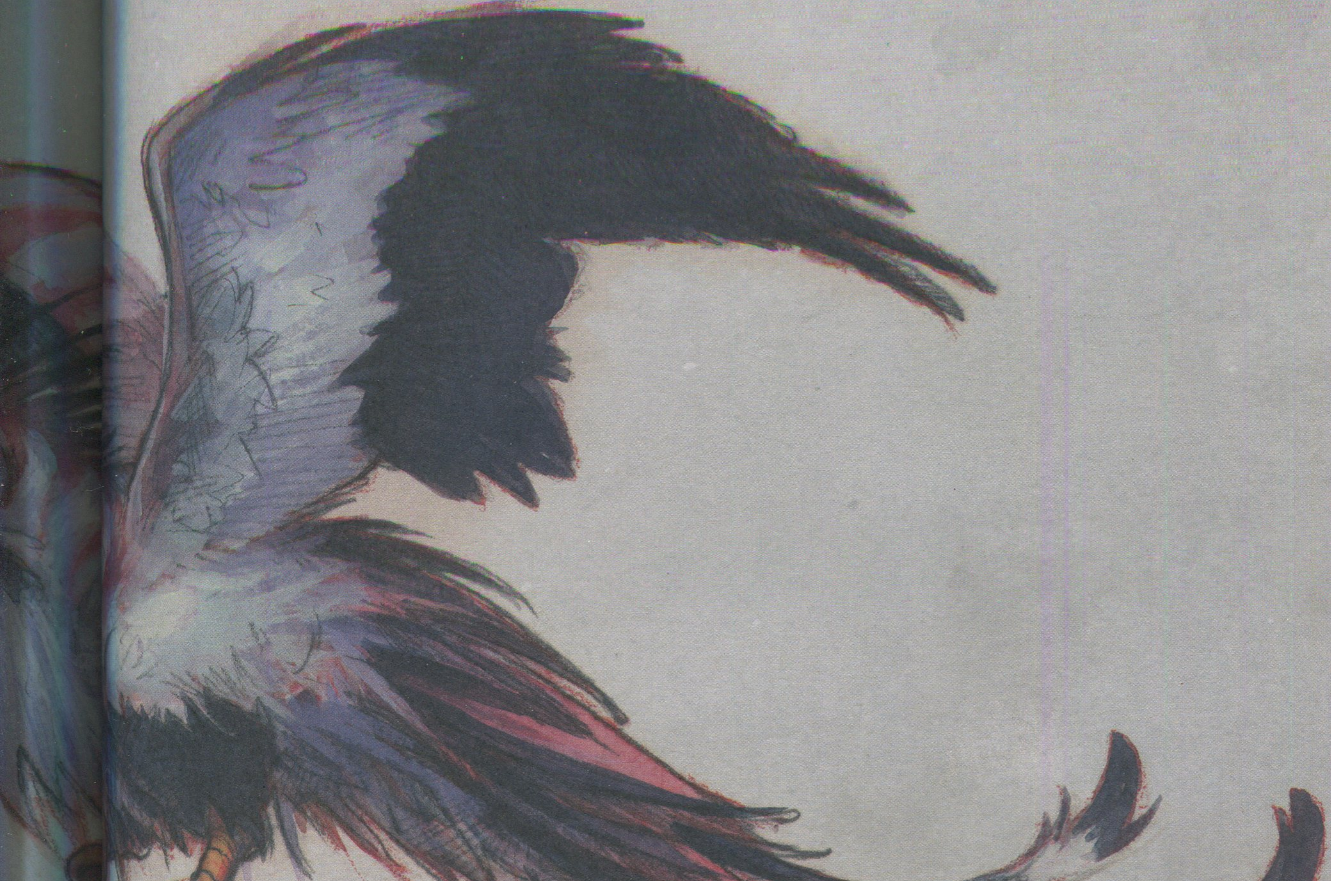
After darkening the upper legs, the balance of dark and light shapes within the design looks great and the phoenix is finally complete. I added a few red stripes over the neck and wings to give the beast an archaic, aged persona, similarly resembling dinosaurs and other primal creatures of the past. The powerful, golden eyes and talons represent the boundless vitality of the sun. Its bangles symbolize that at one point in time the phoenix was part of a powerful civilization, standing tall over the remains of what is now just an ancient ruin. Valiantly waiting to be reborn, this phoenix will in time be part of something new.

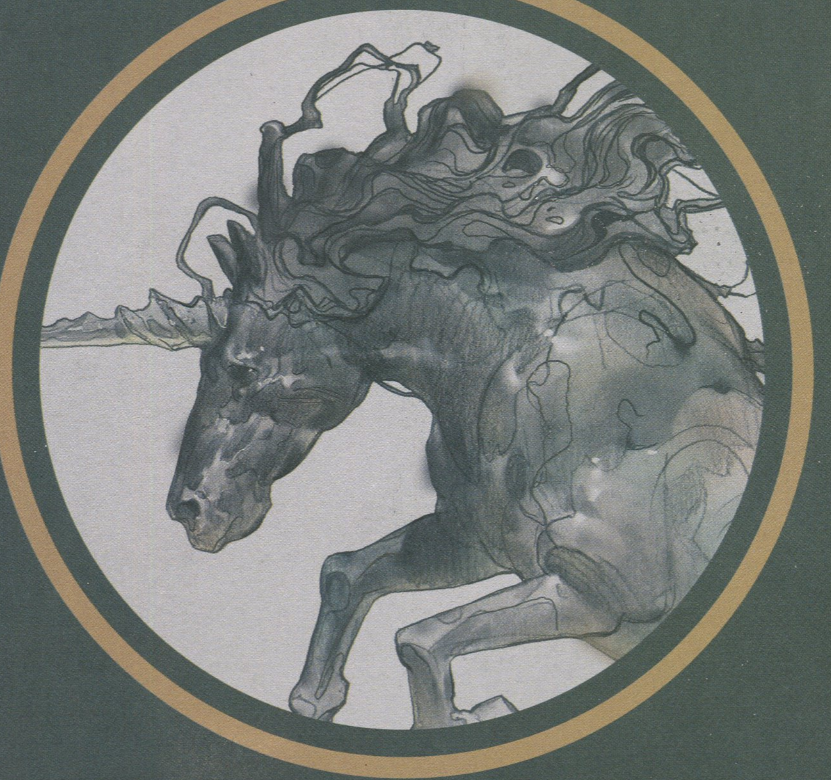


Key facts

Name: Phoenix
Taxonomy: Bird
Region: Worldwide
Habitat: Various
Mythical abilities: Immortality through reincarnation
Threat to humans: 1

Final image © Nityanshu Sharma





• UNICORN •

A popular icon in heraldry, the unicorn is typically understood to have the body of a horse with a single horn protruding from the middle of its head. Ancient Greeks believed the unicorn to be from India, although early references to the beast also come from China and Mesopotamia. These older sources vary in their description of the creature, some referring to features of goats, boars, oxen, stags, narwhals, and lions; once thought to have cloven hooves, more modern recollections of the unicorn stick more strictly to the image of a horse, with single-toed hooves. These days the unicorn is a familiar icon throughout the world. Some believe unicorns to actually be incorrect interpretations of real-world creatures, such as the elasmotherium (an extinct relation to the rhinoceros) or single-horned goats. Some descriptions report the unicorn to be a fierce, wild animal, only to be tamed by a female virgin. The unicorn's horn is believed to possess magical properties, including the power to heal sickness and disease. Its white appearance reflects the beast's association with purity, as it is also known to be able to clear poisoned waters by dipping its horn into them. Indeed, cups made from unicorn horn were highly sought after in the Middle Ages.

• ELIZA IVANOVA •

Fine artist • elizaivanova.com

• FIELD NOTES •

Horses' manes

The unicorn is a seemingly simple character to draw because essentially it is a horse with a horn; however, in order to make it look more magical and not simply like a dressed-up horse, there are a few things to consider, including the design of the horn and mane, the influence of gravity, and what to hide and what to show. My main gripe with a lot of modern unicorn designs is that the animal looks too perfect, like a doll. In my design, I want to focus on making the beast a more feral animal that is messy, imperfect, and wild. With enough research and attention to detail, each element will be designed to fit that description and be grounded in reality.

As I research different types of mane, I stumble upon a horse whose hair is exceptionally wavy, shiny, and elegant. I study the light reflection of the hair with a few strokes. What I like about this design is how graceful the animal looks just because of the texture and placement of the mane. In some ways the hair is what determines the first look, and even personality, of the horse.

Impala

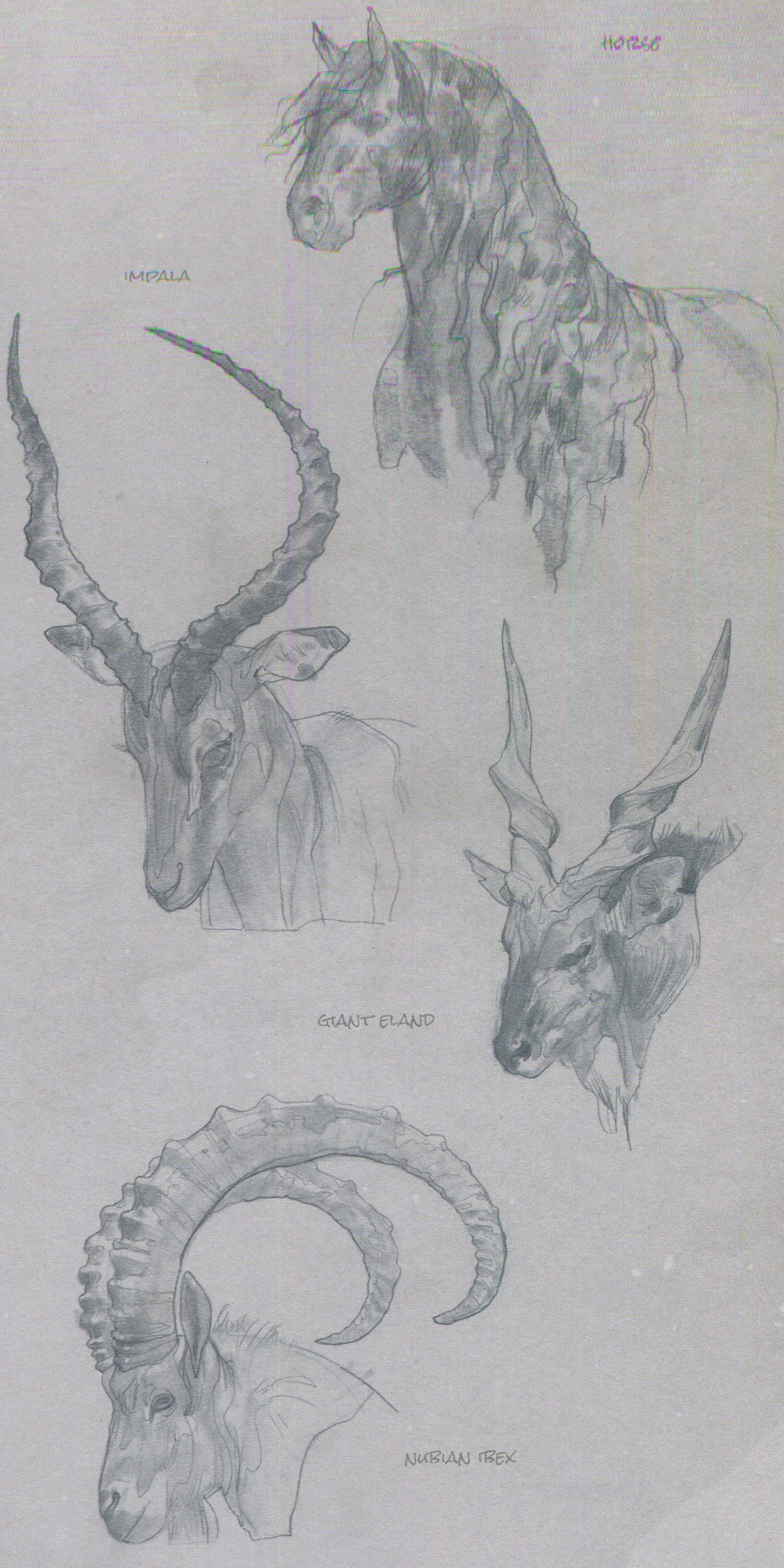
I want to avoid the narwhal type of horn for the horn design because it is overused and I don't think it will fit well with a land mammal. I research various horns in the animal kingdom that will enhance the wild look I want the unicorn to have. The impala has a gorgeous set of horns that have a minimum curve and an interesting ribbed texture.

Giant eland

The giant eland is another animal whose horns I study, this time because of the complex twist in the design of the horn. The beautiful shapes within that design look perfect for my vision of a unicorn horn while keeping it grounded in reality. It is also straighter than other horns I look at, so it will not be too removed from the viewer's expectations of what a unicorn should look like.

Nubian ibex

What I love about the horns of the Nubian ibex is how massive they are compared to the animal. I don't plan to make the unicorn's horn huge, but I like both the texture and amount of detail I can observe on the ibex's horns. The animal feels very muscular and powerful, which is another element that I note down for the final unicorn design.

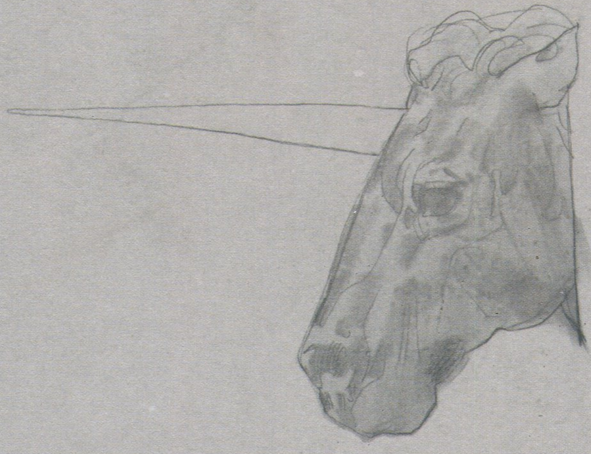


Unicorn horn

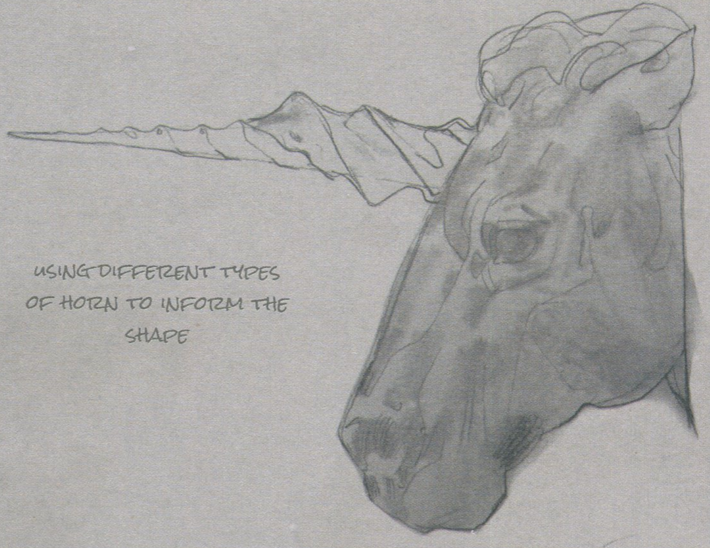
I start designing the unicorn's horn by determining how large it should be compared to the size of the creature's head. I roughly mark out its shape and direction. My preference is for the horn to point in the same direction as the eyes look, and not upwards. It makes it look more menacing and practical rather than something from a children's fairy tale. This direction of the horn should also complement more poses as it will not clash with the flow of motion as much as an upward-pointing horn: a simple choice like this will go a long way.

Next I focus on designing the general shape of the ribbed texture of the horn. I use the giant eland's twisted horn for the base of the horn; even though I keep the horn straight, I use the impala's textured horn surface for the rest. Combining two horn types provides enough variation to demonstrate that this horn is not simply a prop but an actual weapon for fighting and defense. It also creates something unique and original.

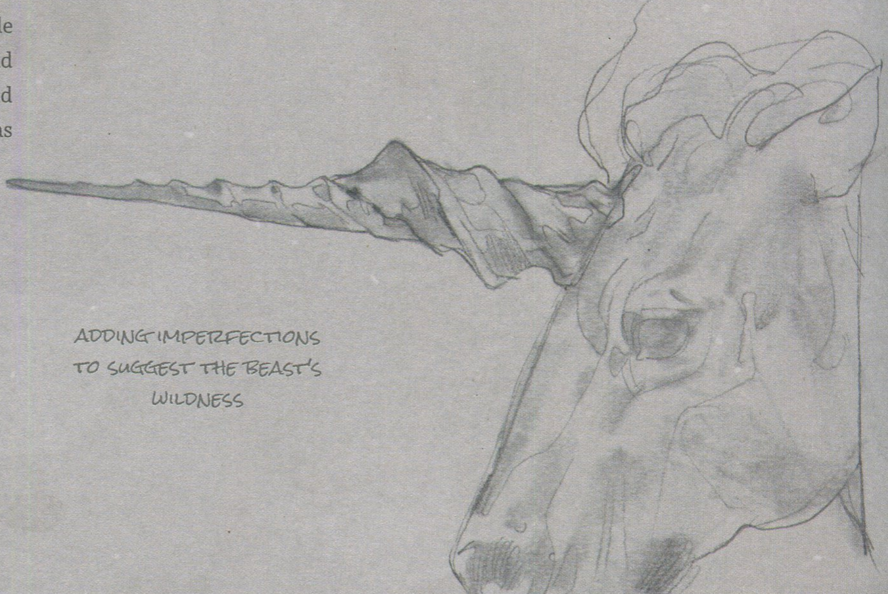
Finally, I texture the whole structure based on the ibex's horns, which have a lot of definition and little imperfections. The more imperfections I add, the more true to the wild character it will become. I like the lack of sheen on the surface; it almost looks as if it is made out of stone, which gives it a heavy look and suggests it is not easily broken. The horn should accentuate the feral aspect of the creature as much as possible.



CONSIDERING THE PLACEMENT AND DIRECTION OF THE HORN



USING DIFFERENT TYPES OF HORN TO INFORM THE SHAPE



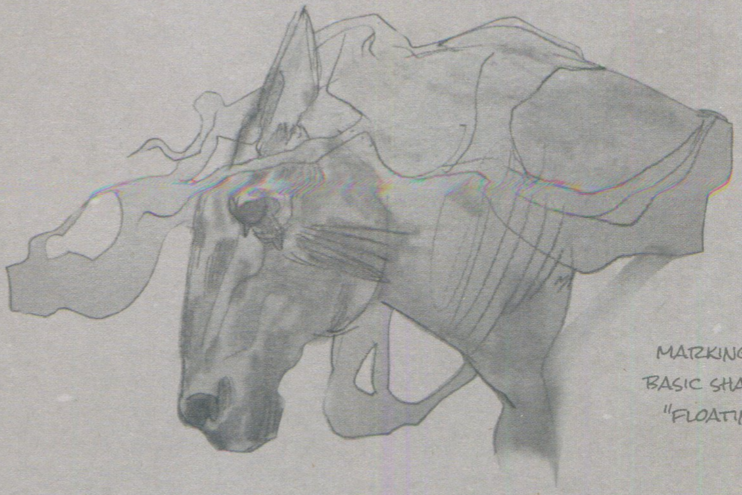
ADDING IMPERFECTIONS TO SUGGEST THE BEAST'S WILDNESS

Horse mane

I want to use the unicorn's mane as one of the most significant design elements. While the unicorn is feral, I still want it to have a magical aspect to it, so gravity should not play too much of a role in the way the hair behaves. I would like the mane to almost float in mid-air, as if blown by the wind or underwater. It could also be used to partially hide the unicorn's face so that the creature looks more mysterious and otherworldly. I mark out the basic shape of the hair to begin.

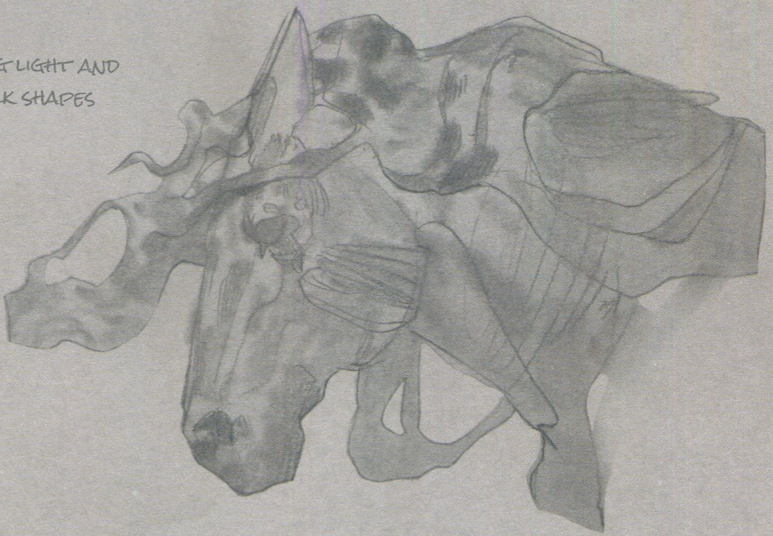
I then lay the main light and dark shapes with a blending stick to define the untamed, wavy nature of the hair. I continue to think about the overall mane design. I push for that permanent "windy" look, which adds a lot of motion to the design with minimal effort. While wild horses' hair is not as sleek as that of groomed, domesticated animals, I still want it to have a lustrous appearance.

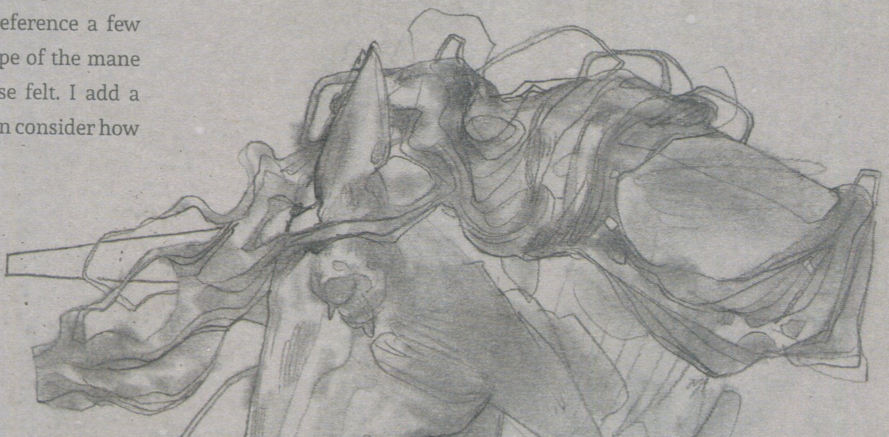
I keep the mane rather shiny here but will add further kinks and imperfections within the overall shape of the mane later to make it feel more unkempt and wild. At this stage, I am still in exploratory mode, so my focus is to capture the textures of the hair close-up, and not worry too much about the overall look of the animal. I want the mane to complement the muscular face of the horse, and also to play a part in the flow of the neck and head. I reference a few horse sculptures where the shape of the mane added to how dynamic the pose felt. I add a simple horn shape in so that I can consider how the hair will work with it.



MARKING OUT THE BASIC SHAPE OF THE "FLOATING" HAIR

ADDING LIGHT AND DARK SHAPES





WORKING IN MORE DETAILS AND TEXTURES

• DESIGN PROCESS •

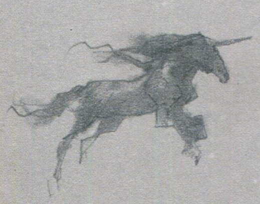
Thumbnails

These thumbnails are quick, one-minute poses that are loose and aim to capture the flow of motion and overall silhouette of the unicorn. They vary from dynamic running poses to still views of the unicorn standing, kneeling, or sitting. I tried different types of manes in a few of these, just to see what would eventually feel best for the final design. In most of the thumbnails, the hair flows to accentuate how majestic the creature is and to help convey the idea that there is a supernatural force involved (that the hair is always flowing, even if there is no wind).

I quickly outlined each silhouette, and then layered the lights and shadows with a blending stick. I find this is the fastest way to map out surface textures and decide where the light is coming from. Clarity is key for thumbnails, since they are so quick and rough; the clearer the thumbnail, the stronger the final pose will be. This is especially helpful if you are pushing the story element in your illustration. A good thumbnail is a great starting point for building complex pieces that have multiple layers and need a solid silhouette.

I like the thumbnails where the unicorn is standing on two legs, as it adds movement to the design and emphasizes the beast's power. I decided to use single-toed hooves rather than cloven ones because I think they look more elegant, majestic, and fit for speed.

01



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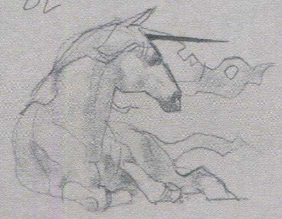

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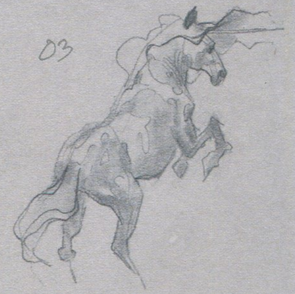

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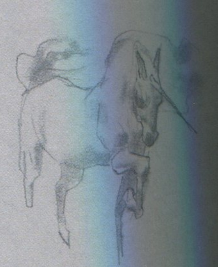

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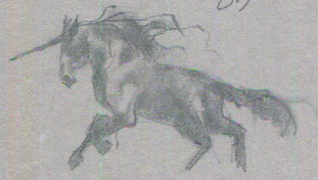

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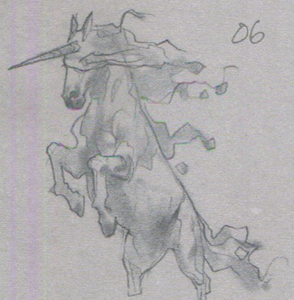

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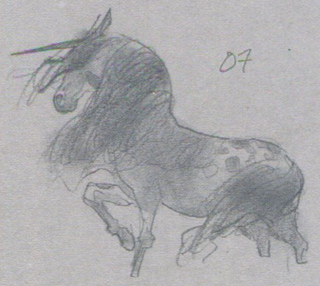

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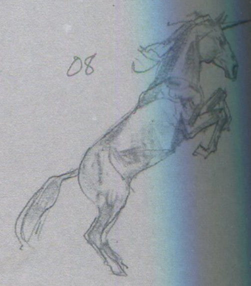

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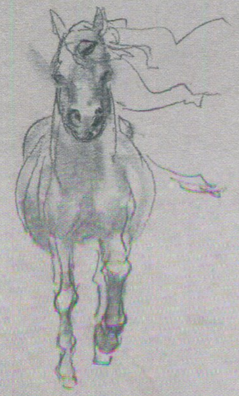

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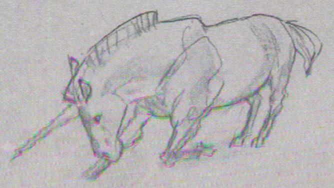

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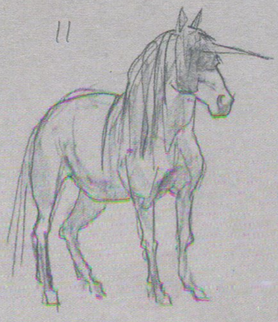

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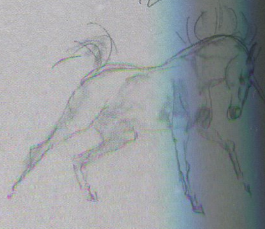
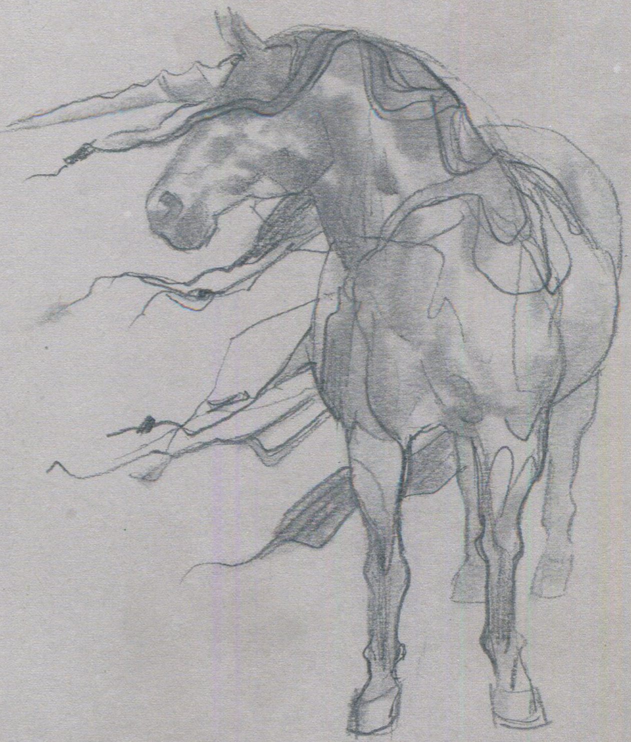
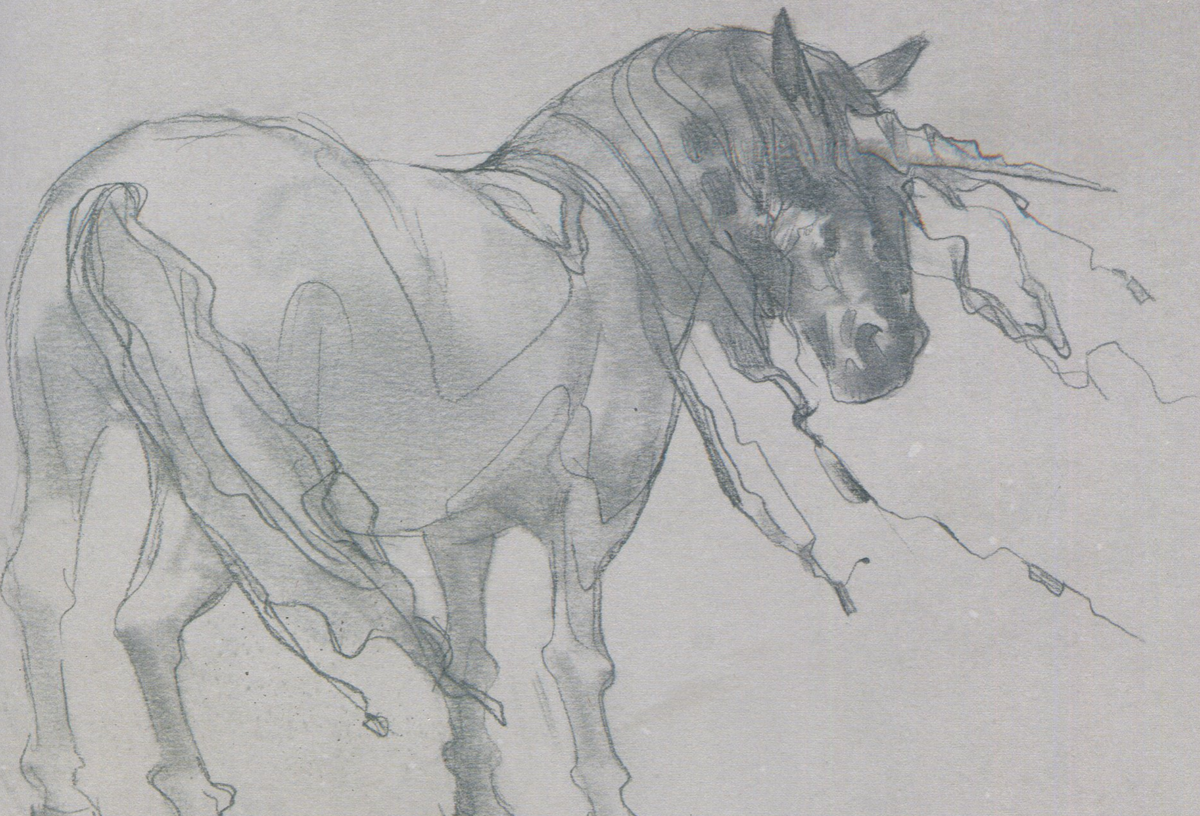


Further exploration

To work towards the final design, I chose a unicorn whose legs are a bit shorter: one with a powerful body, a stout physique, and a darker head and mane than the rest of its body as a distinctive characteristic. Working from the front, I hid the eyes to make the unicorn appear mysterious, even in close proximity. The mane is messy and drapes onto the body and head as a design element.

From behind you can see the powerful back legs and a tail full of kinks, because, as I have already established, this is a wild beast. With both of these views, my goal was to create a strong silhouette that reads well from afar, so I kept the snout and horn clear of the flowing hair locks. From the rear angle in particular, the dark mane and hidden eyes give the unicorn a more sinister appearance.

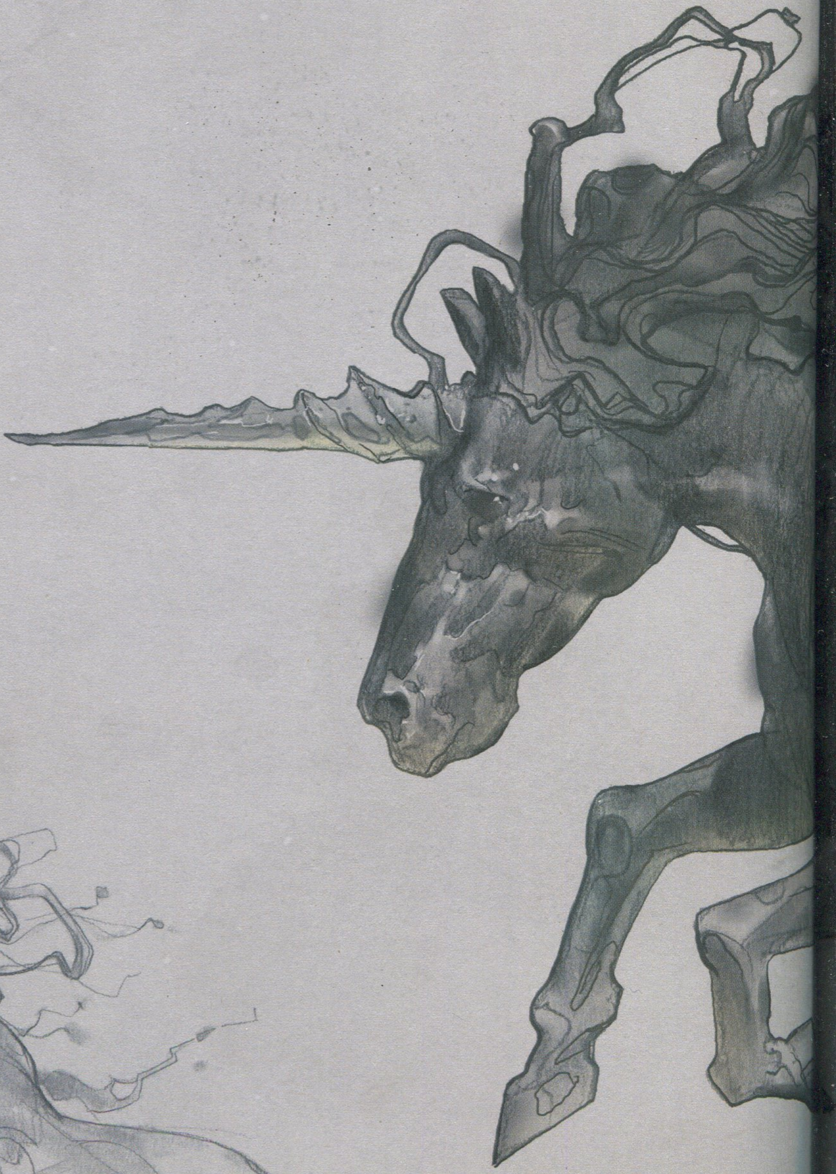


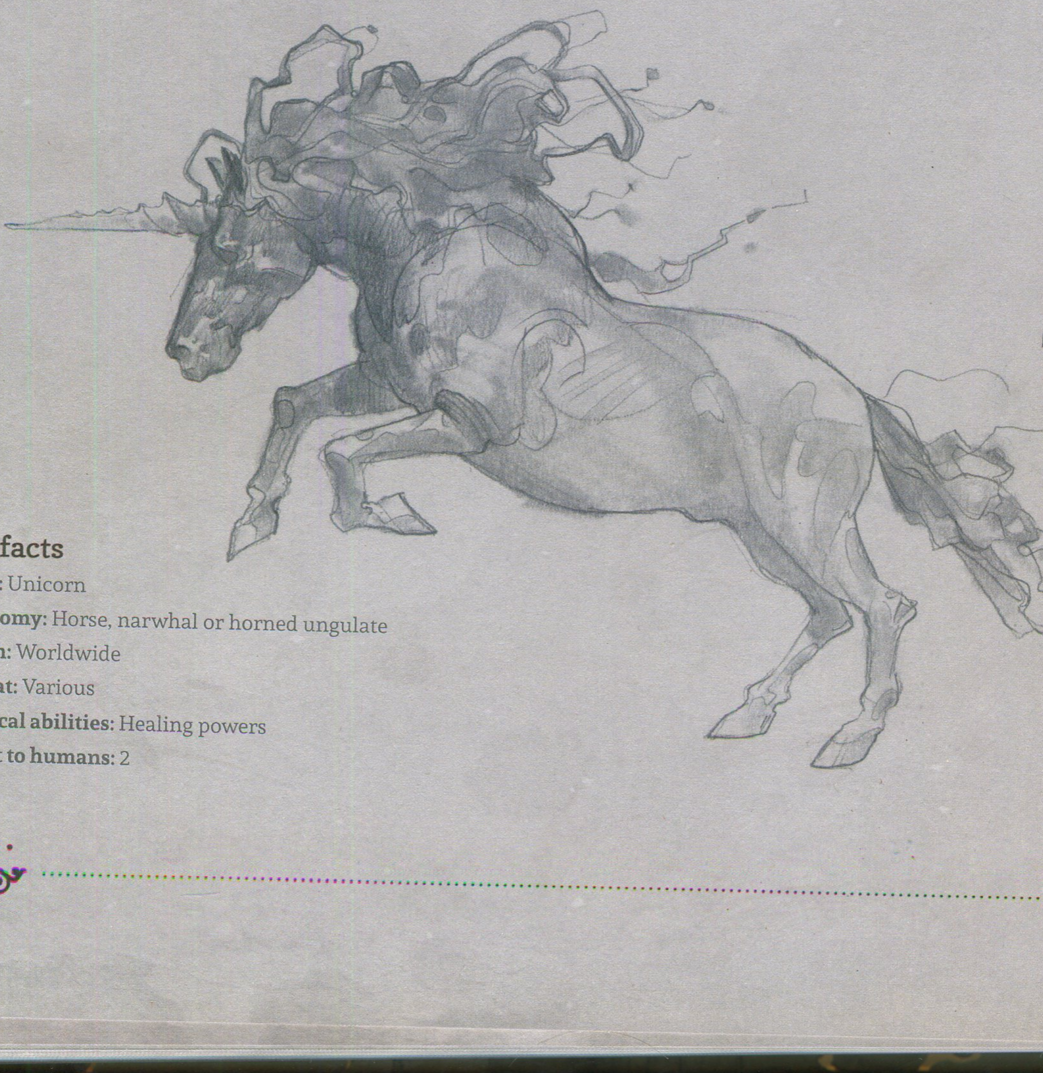


• FINAL DESIGN •

Here you can see the final design of the unicorn. The side view displays the full anatomy well and is also the optimum vantage point from which to observe the most distinctive feature: the horn. I chose a pose with the front legs raised based on a couple of the thumbnails that I thought successfully displayed the power and potential ferocity of the unicorn. The locks in this final drawing are much more defined and shiny than in my exploratory sketches, but are still tangled in bundles with kinks. I actually removed a lot of the shine in the mane and added it to the body and head musculature instead after studying various wild horse types.

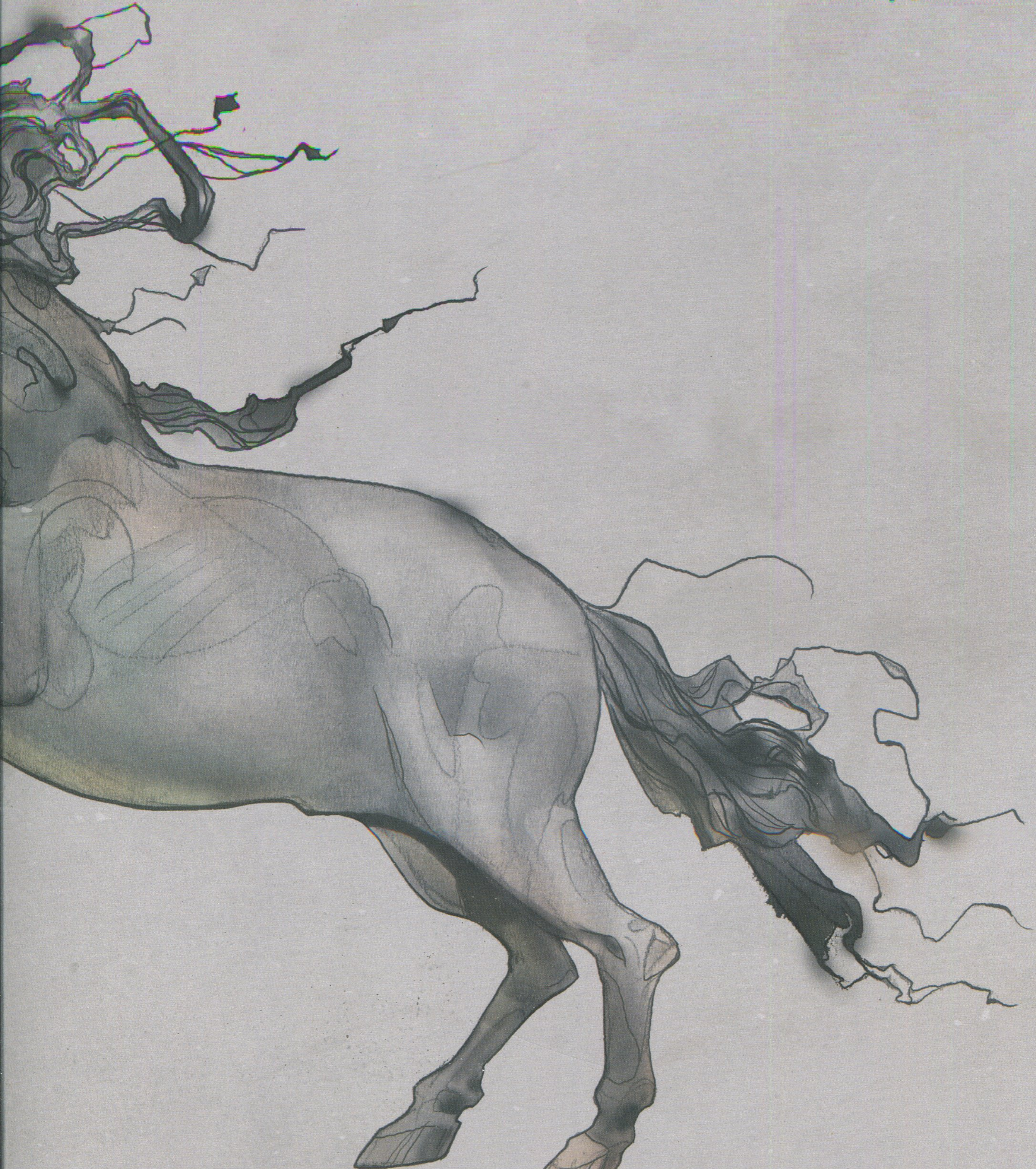
Adding definition to the face is one of my favorite stages when drawing horses, so I paid special attention to the unicorn's facial features. The mane and tail are dark rather than a more perfect-looking white; however I decided against hiding the eye with hair as I did not want the unicorn to look too sinister and evil, just a little wild. The movement and gesture of the mane and tail suggest it is an untamed beast, which was what I wanted to portray. The hint of green color enhances the magical, ethereal nature of the creature.



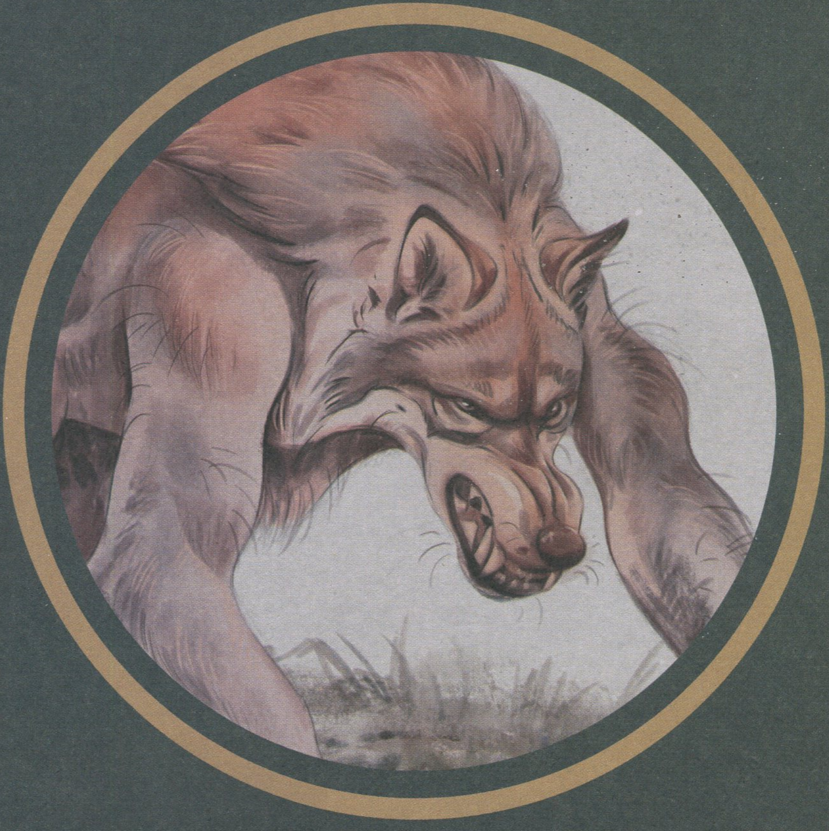


Key facts

Name: Unicorn
Taxonomy: Horse, narwhal or horned ungulate
Region: Worldwide
Habitat: Various
Mythical abilities: Healing powers
Threat to humans: 2



Final Image © Eliza Ivanova



• WEREWOLF •

The werewolf or wolf-man is a human with the ability to shapeshift into a monstrous wolf or a hybrid wolf-like creature that is half-man, half-wolf. They are often encountered in European folklore, where descriptions of them differ greatly; the transformation from man to wolf may be deliberate, irrepressible, or incited by an incantation, can be short-lived or permanent, and may be physical or a case of the human spirit temporarily leaving the body to reside and hunt in that of a wolf's. People can become werewolves by either being put under a curse or if they are bitten or scratched by another werewolf. Some werewolves shapeshift during a full moon. It is common that werewolves usually have the same fur color as their hair color when in human form. While the idea of a wolf-man is more familiar to us today, both male and female humans are in fact susceptible to the werewolf curse. In the early modern period werewolves were closely associated with witchcraft; indeed, there are known to have been werewolf trials in certain areas of Europe during this period. Variations of werewolves have also been noted in other parts of the world, such as the American Southwest and the Caribbean.

• ANDREA FEMERSTRAND •

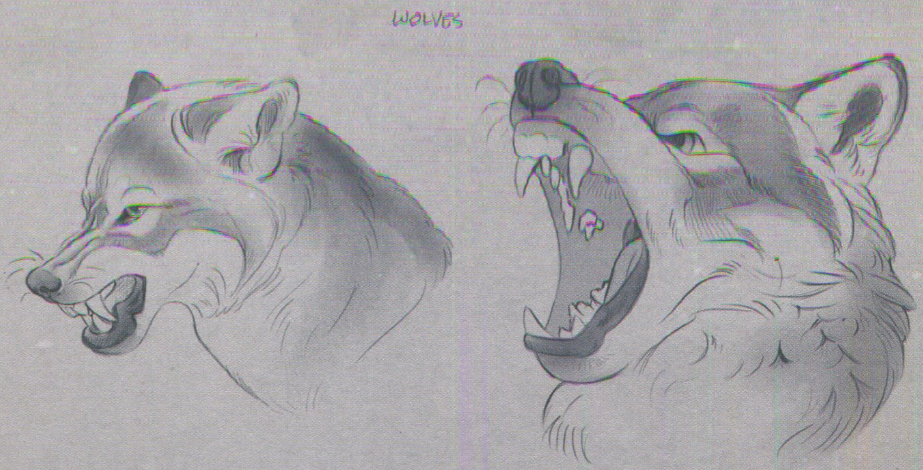
Concept artist & illustrator • noukah.com

• FIELD NOTES •

Wolves

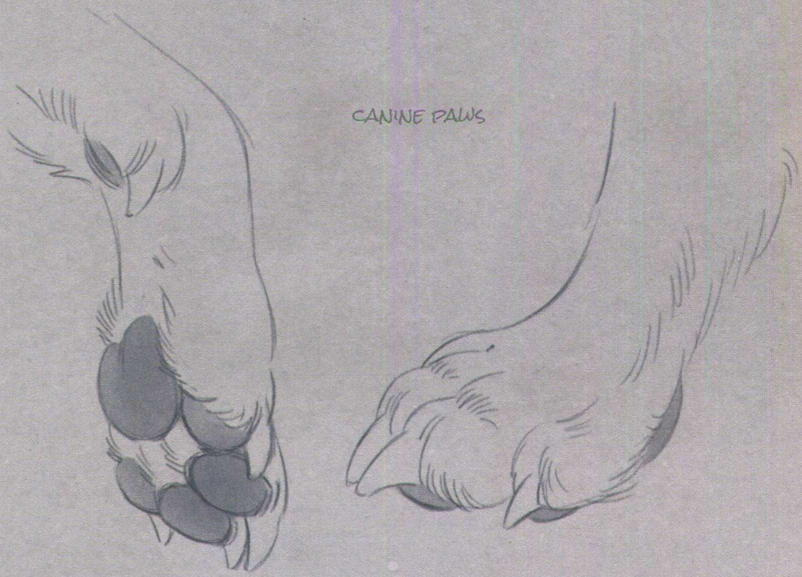
Since werewolves mostly resemble actual wolves, I want to study growling ones to catch their already aggressive characteristics, especially the anatomy and proportions of the mouth. It is interesting how much the upper part of the mouth pulls up and back when canines show their teeth.

I study wolves' faces from different angles to further my knowledge. In the top right sketch you can again see how much the upper lip is pulled upwards. You can also notice that the side teeth become covered by the wolf's cheeks and lips; it is all about the front fangs. The intense eyes add even more to the already dangerous expression and make the wolf look malicious. I may exaggerate the eyebrow slightly to really bring out its expression.



Paws

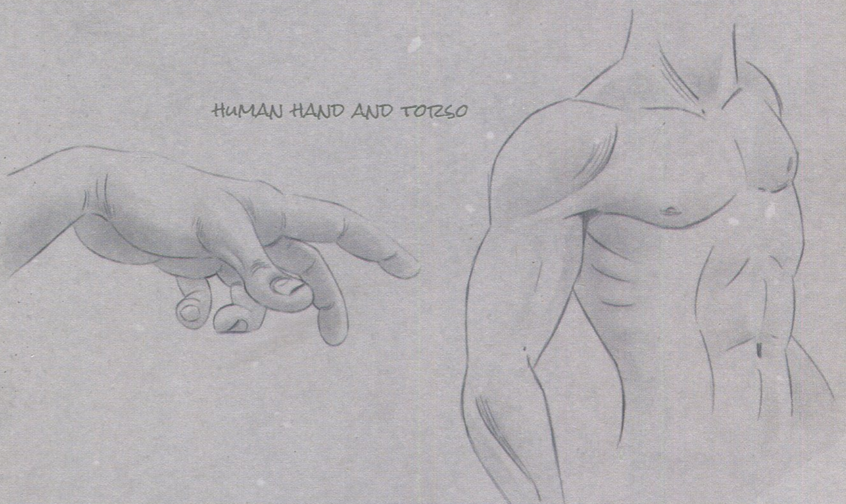
I start to get a fairly good idea of how I would like to tackle the design at this point. I would like the final design of the werewolf to be in animal form in the main, as I'm very fond of traditional wolves and I think this will better convey the wildness of the creature. I continue by studying the paws of canines to figure out a way to merge real human hands with paws believably. I think about how the paw pads work and where the claws are attached on the paws.



Humans

I then study human hands. This sketch is based on my own hand, although I try to make it a bit more masculine. Deciding what elements to exaggerate in order to achieve the look I want is something I try to think about during the whole initial sketching phase.

Before going ahead with the design, I make sure that I understand the anatomy and proportions of a male torso as well, as the werewolf will still need some human elements in it to make it clear it is not just an ordinary wolf. I would like the werewolf to look as though it has the ability to stand upright, so a strong core and human-like arms will help this.



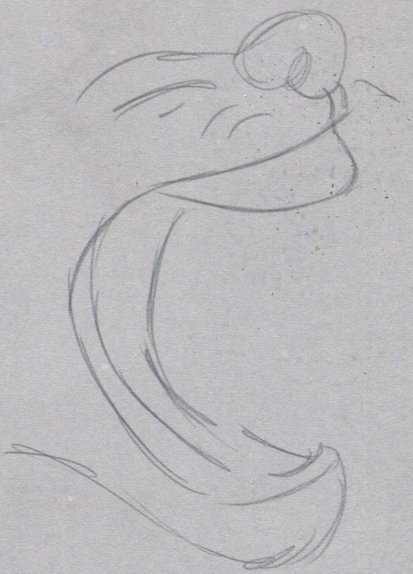
Canine teeth

When it comes to the wolf's teeth, I start by loosely sketching only the mouth, with some of the gums visible in the further, upper part of the mouth. I add the lips, which are usually black and a significant characteristic of a canine. I only draw the outlines to make sure that the shapes work well together. It is very important to have an understanding of how the skull and jaw is constructed and how the mouth opens and closes properly in order to make a design believable.

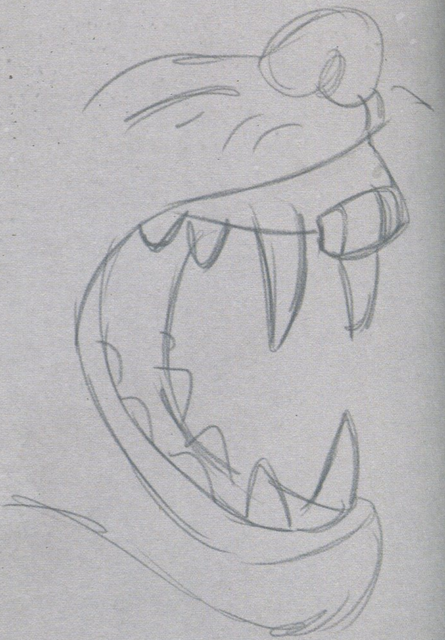
I then sketch the placement of the teeth. A wolf has forty-two teeth. The upper and lower jaws have two canine teeth each. You won't see all of the teeth in this sketch as I focus on the visible ones, which are the canines, some of the incisors, and some of the premolars. The rest are hidden behind the wolf's cheeks, deeper inside the mouth. A wolf can crush bones with its strong jaw, so don't be afraid to exaggerate the teeth, since they are definitely an important feature of a werewolf; I want them to look even stronger than those of a traditional wolf.

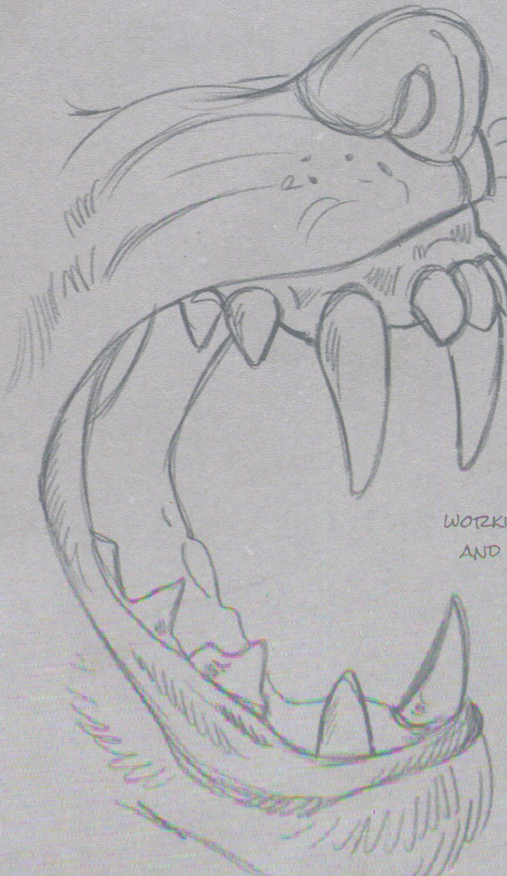
I start cleaning up the sketch, focusing on negative versus positive space to create a pleasing balance of shape, and to really bring out those large fangs. I don't worry too much about drawing every single tooth, as this can tend to make a drawing a bit stiff.

BASIC OUTLINE



ADDING TEETH





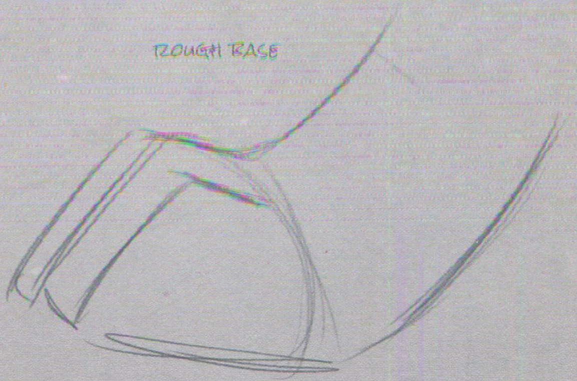
WORKING WITH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SPACE

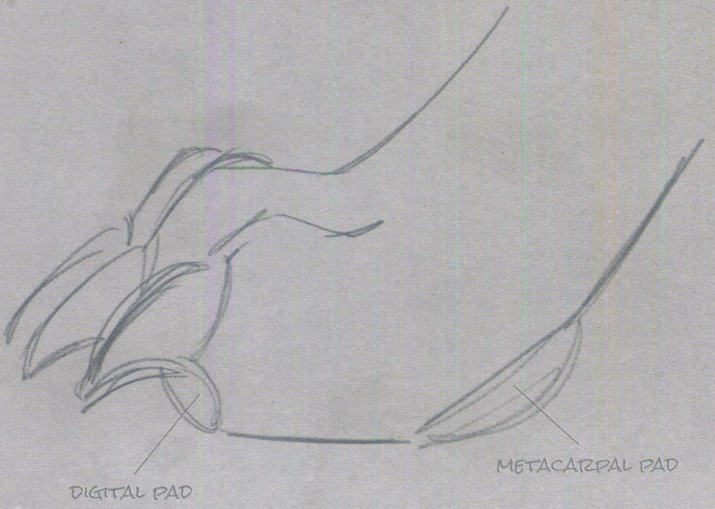
Canine paws and claws

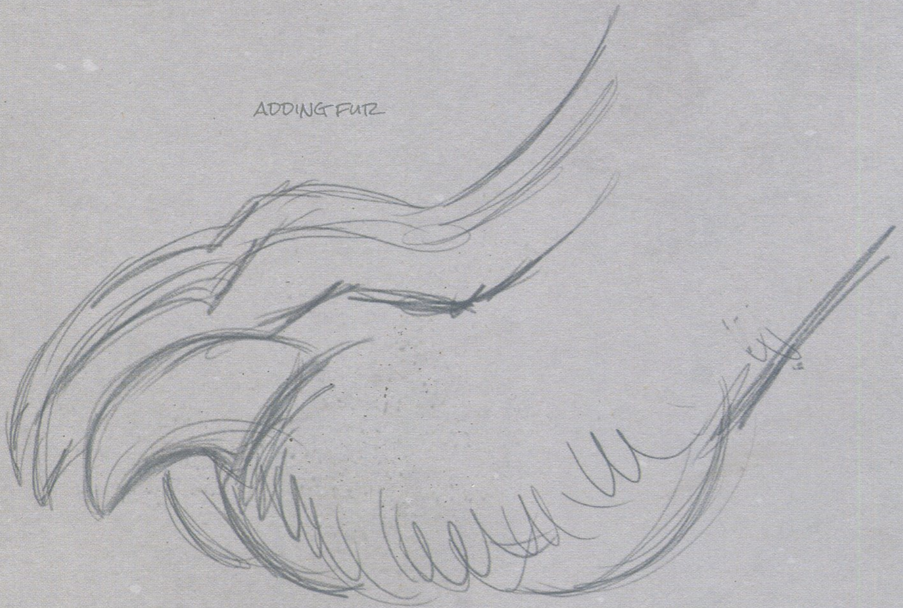
For the wolf paw I start by sketching a rough base as if the wolf is standing on the ground. Canines have four toes on each paw, and one claw per toe. Due to the angle you can only see three visible toes in this drawing.

Canine paws also have paw pads: a larger one called the metacarpal pad, and four digital pads, one under each toe. I only draw a hint of the metacarpal and one digital pad in this view, placing the claws above the digital pads.

I refine the sketch slightly by defining the fur and the claws of the paw. I practice sketching paws at different angles as understanding the anatomy here is essential in being able to construct a paw realistically. It can be a challenge, but simplifying the structure as only the outline of a paw with the paw pads helps a lot in the beginning.







• DESIGN PROCESS •

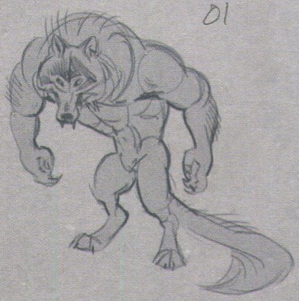
Thumbnails

As there are many interpretations of werewolves in their various transformed states, I tried to explore widely before settling with a design I liked. I focused on finding an appealing pose, a pleasing shape for the mane, and an interesting angle for the face.

Some of the thumbnails are more feline than canine, so these ones don't stay true enough to werewolf folklore for me to move forward with. Other thumbnails felt a bit too human; while I want to incorporate human elements to demonstrate that it is not a regular wolf, I still want the design to look beastly and wild.

Some of the thumbnails show the werewolf wearing human clothes, as the image of a powerful animal bursting through clothing is one that is commonly associated with the werewolf myth in modern times. However I prefer the sketches where the beast is free from constraint and ready to run wild.

My favorite thumbnail is 03. I fell in love with the idea that werewolves may have the ability to both run on all four legs like quadruped animals and to stand straight up like a human being; anatomically thumbnail 03 looks as though it could do this. The humped mane and sharp claws give it more of an intimidating look, and the fur looks more unkempt and wild than some of the other werewolf thumbnails.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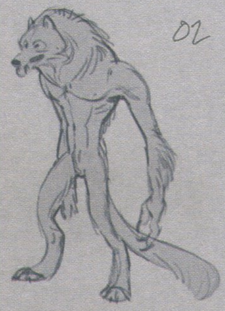
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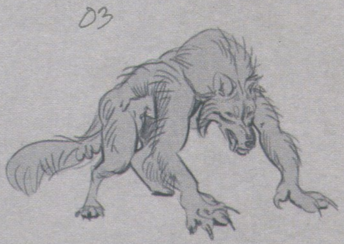
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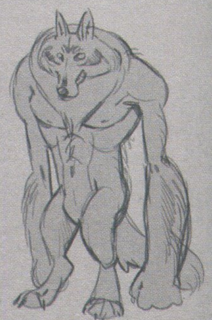
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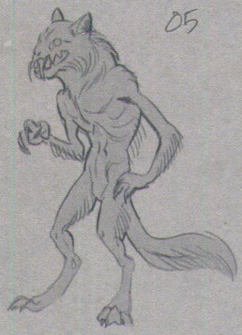
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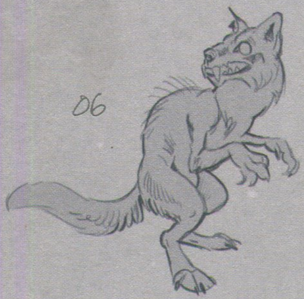
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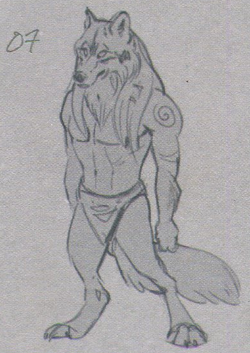
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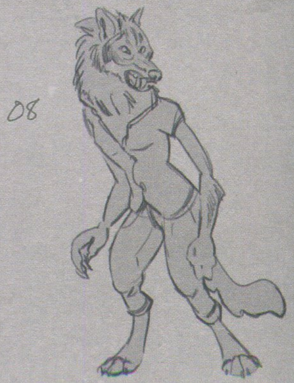
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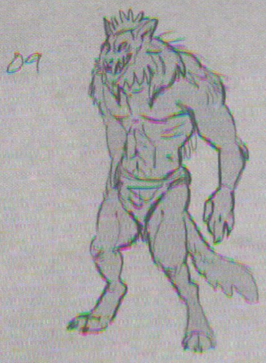
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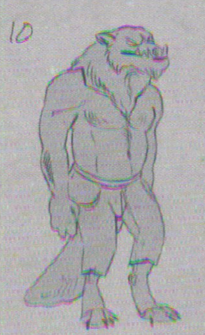
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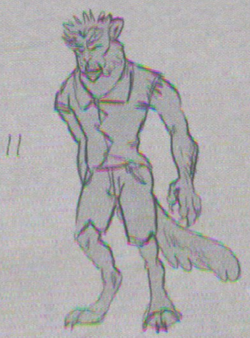
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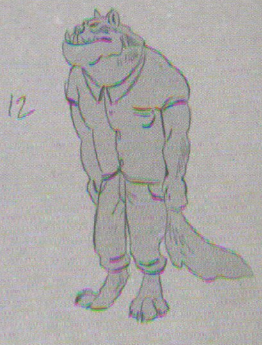
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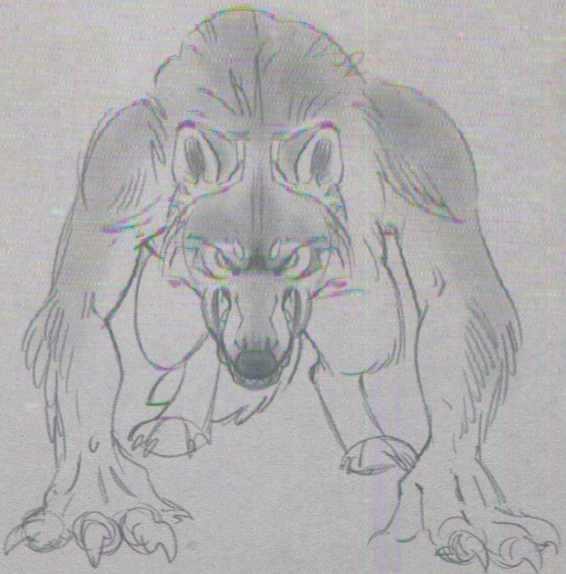
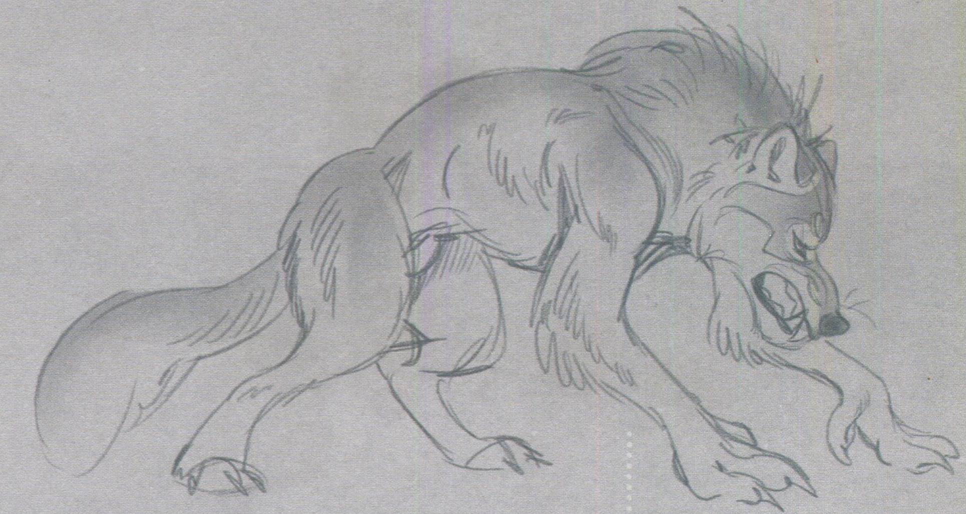
Further exploration

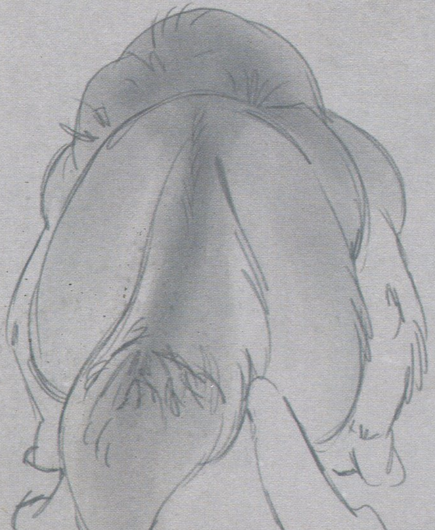
Looking at the development of thumbnail 03 from the front you can see that the head is slightly longer but still very close to that of a real wolf. The eyes should be expressive with an intense look at the viewer; some folklorists say that while in a wolf-state the human eyes of the beast are still recognizable, so I need them to convey intelligence and emotion. The shoulders are broad, the arms lean and strong. The paws err towards the human side of the creature as they are similar to large hands with dark sharp claws.

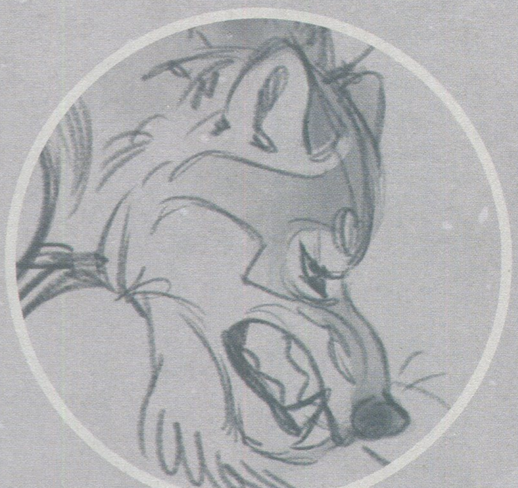


A side view should be well balanced and readable. I really like the shape of the mane and shoulders, which are quite heavyset, compared to the toned body that is lean and flexible rather than bulky. I want to make it clear that the werewolf can chase prey at great speed, emphasizing that it is something to be feared. The hind legs are slightly smaller compared to the arms but are still strong enough to carry the entire body when the werewolf leaps through the air during an attack.



From behind you can observe the tail, which I make medium in length, thick, and bushy. There is also a dark stripe running through the werewolf's back all the way to the end of the tail, which adds an appealing design element and is similar to what you would see on a real-world wolf.

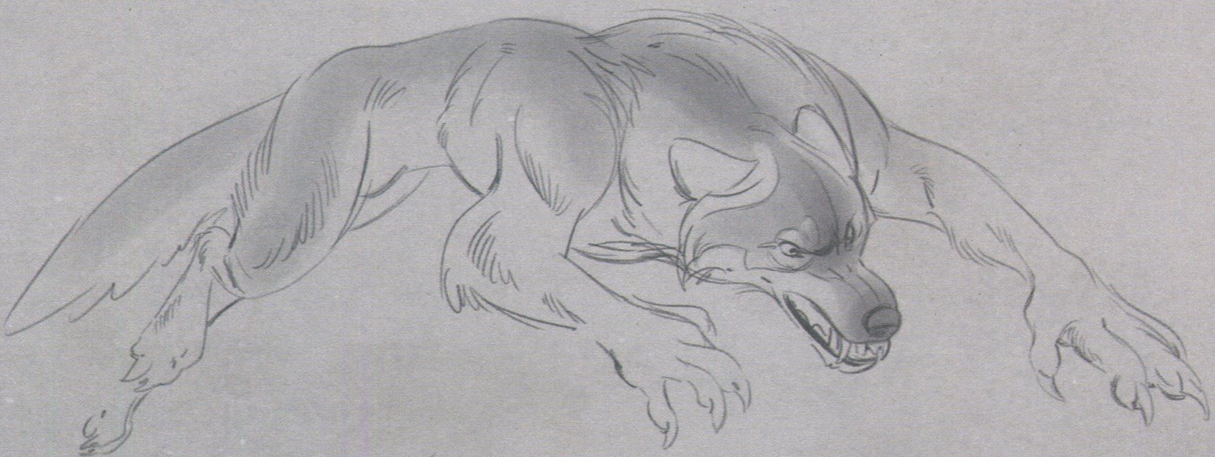


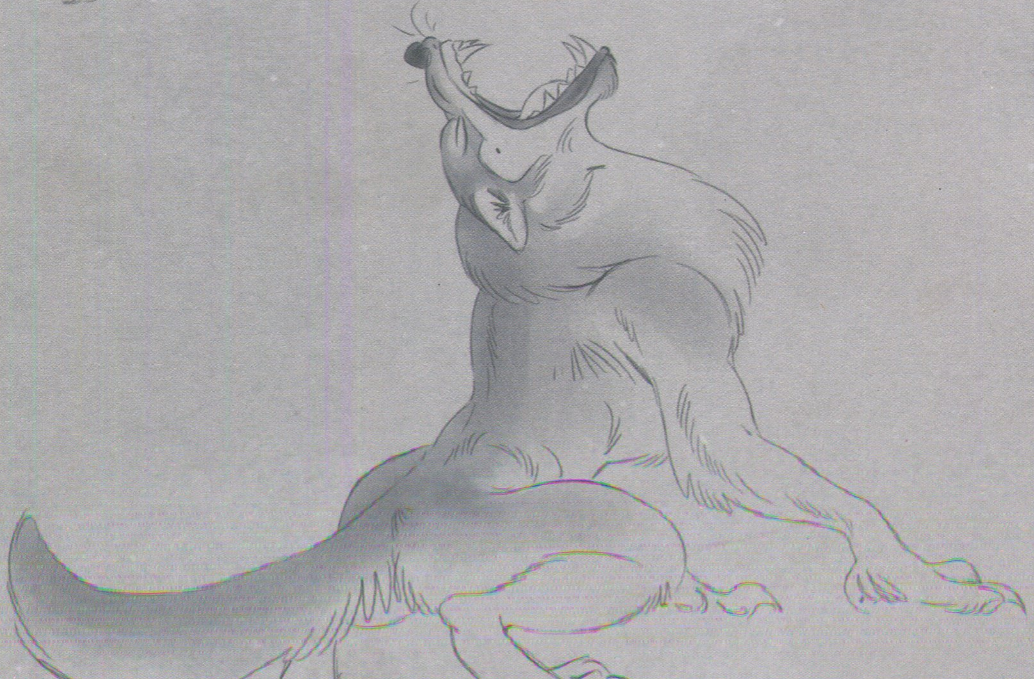


Poses

I see werewolves as merciless hunters, killing machines. When exploring poses, it therefore felt natural to first sketch a werewolf leaping through the air, probably ambushing its prey. Thanks to their human features and amazing strength, I see werewolves as being very flexible and acrobatic. One cannot dodge this bloodthirsty beast once it has set a target. The face is snarling and its claws are bared.

And of course werewolves howl. Loud and clear, usually during a full moon, which is what the second sketch shows. I believe that they can communicate with regular wolves, and howl to mark their territory. To make the strongest howl possible, they point their heads up and curve their entire body to really open up the throat and ribcage. You can see the potential for the beast to stand on two legs more in this second pose.





• SUBSPECIES •

Feral werewolf

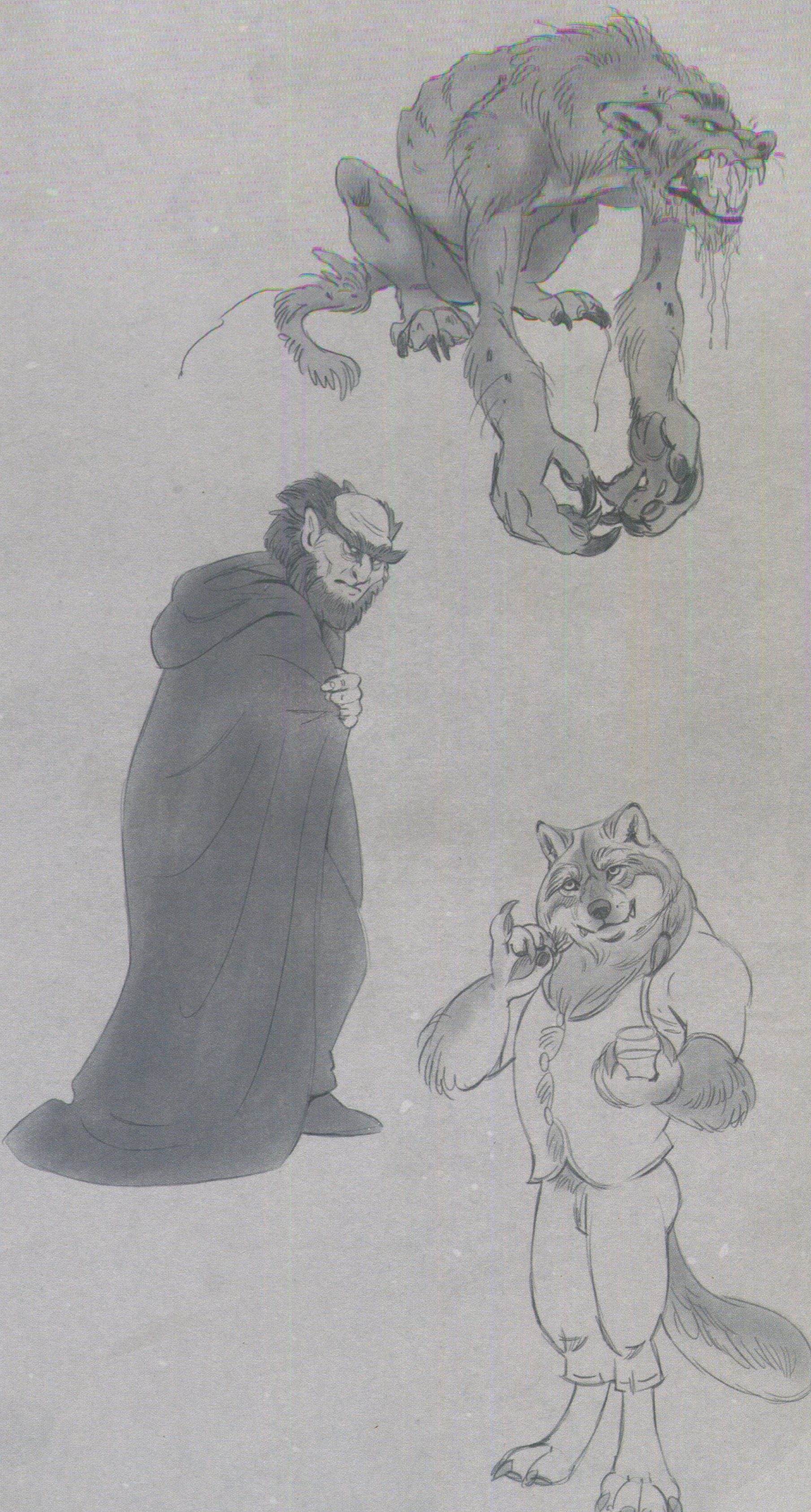
As mentioned, the states, extremes, and characteristics of werewolves vary greatly in folklore through the ages, so you will see this in the different subspecies depicted here. Some werewolves are known to be feral, and beyond repair. They are in a permanent wolf state and extremely vicious. People who turn into werewolves are often believed to inherit their human background and personality during the curse, sometimes in an exaggerated form. The feral werewolf shown at the top of the page here was extremely angry when it transformed, and you can see this personality reflected in its ugly, distorted anatomy and lack of care for the dribbling saliva around its ferocious teeth.

Vampiric werewolf

In Eastern European folklore, vampire and werewolf myths could be quite closely tied together. Here you can see a vampiric werewolf in its human state. As werewolves can shapeshift, legends say that it is possible to identify a werewolf in human form by their canine features. For example, it is common that both of their eyebrows are merged into one and are very bushy; they have thick facial hair and the ears appear lower than on regular humans. Their noses also have more canine elements than a regular human. The vampiric werewolf is known to be sensitive to daylight and drink the blood of its victims.

Domesticated werewolf

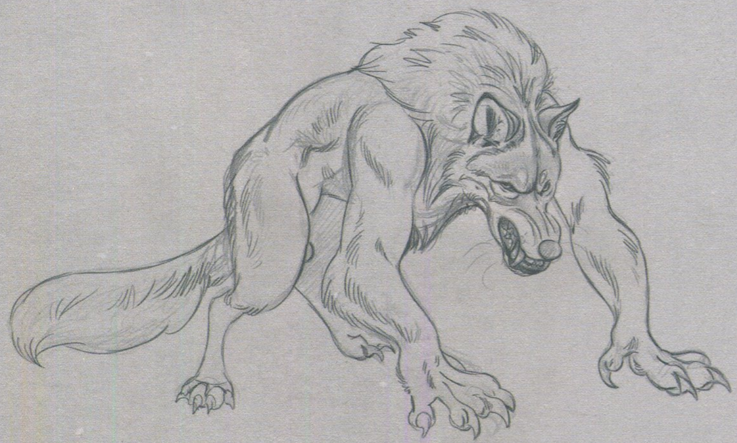
Despite the name, the domesticated werewolf is not quite as tame as you would think. The sophisticated specimen depicted here is in a permanent werewolf state. While they still try to behave like human beings, wearing smart clothing and being well groomed, domesticated werewolves can turn aggressive and bloodthirsty during a full moon. This particular werewolf lives alone in a huge mansion that has been long forgotten. I suspect though, that during a full-moon episode, it may have eaten all its staff. Hopefully it has managed to spare the butler.

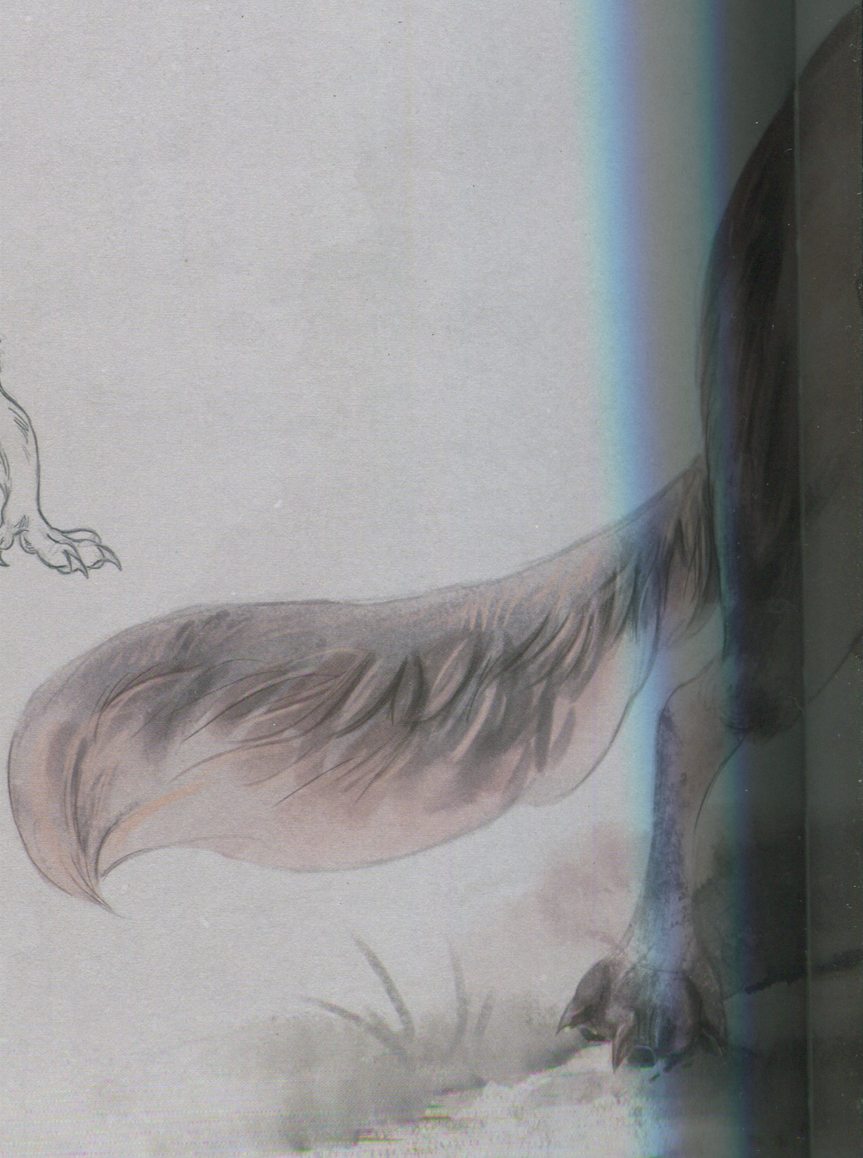


• FINAL DESIGN •

Here is the final design of the werewolf. It has a lean, muscular, athletic body with large teeth and sharp claws. Its huge hands and paws are dirty from the soil, after either a hunting session or a fight. I hinted at some scars on its back to reflect the challenging and violent lifestyle it leads.

I picked its coat and colors to be the same as a regular wolf's, which helps the design to feel more believable. The shaggy mane adds to the sense of power behind the upper body, and makes it clear it is a wild animal. Alongside its dangerous, feral nature, I still wanted it to appear rather intelligent, so I made sure its eyes were fixed on something in the distance.





Key facts

Name: Werewolf

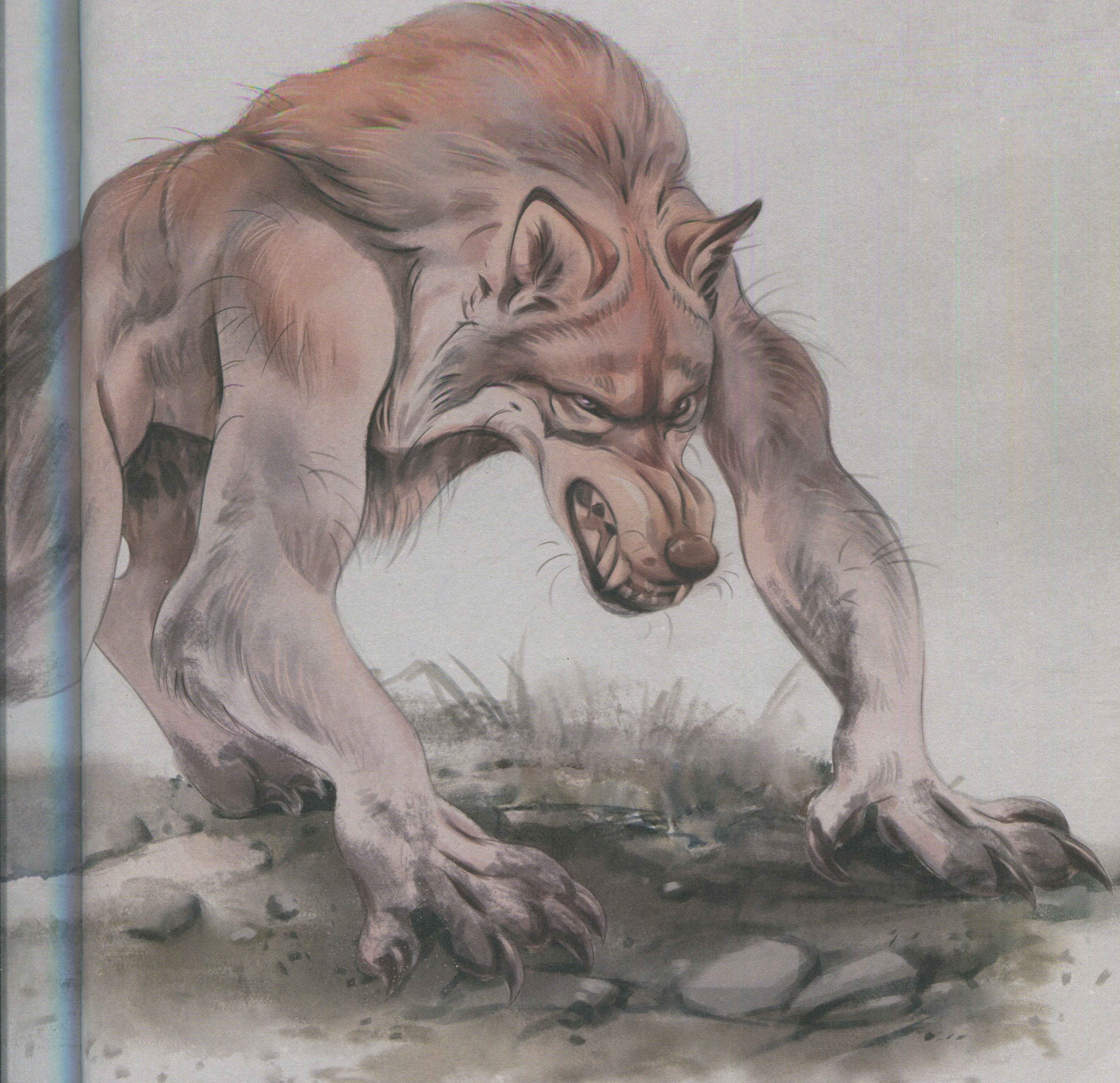
Taxonomy: Wolf, human

Region: Worldwide

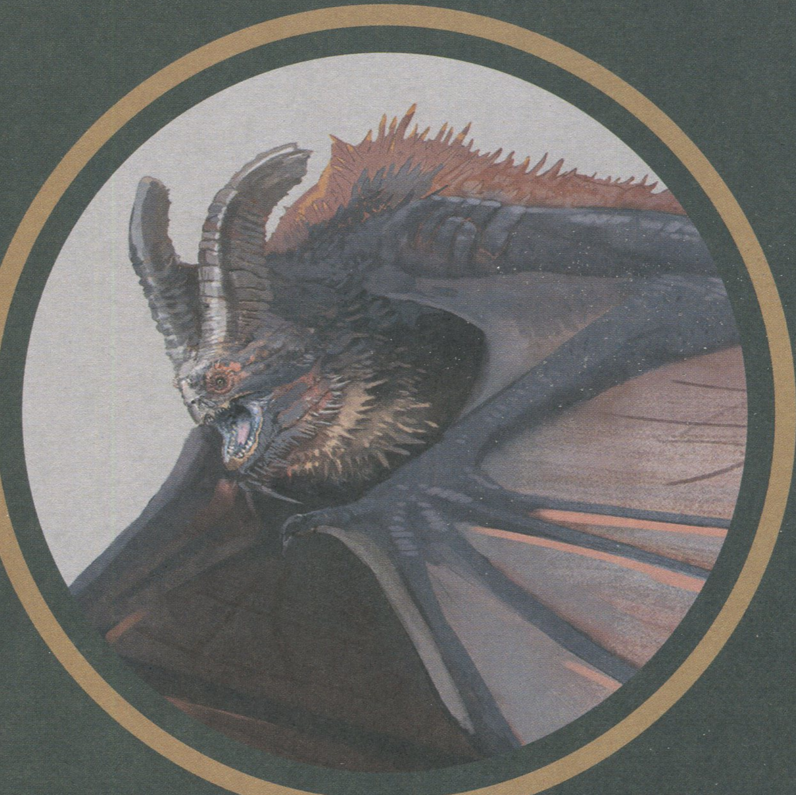
Habitat: Forests, rural areas

Mythical abilities: Shapeshifter

Threat to humans: 4



Final image © Andrea Femerstrand



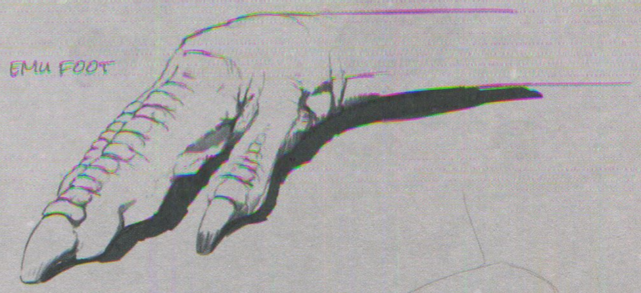
• WYVERN •

A wyvern is often described as a two-winged, two-legged reptilian creature that has a long serpentine neck and a barbed tail. Its bite is venomous and, unlike its cousin, the dragon, it is unable to breathe fire. The wyvern is often perceived as a symbol of strength, seen on coats of arms during times of war. It inhabits most of the European continent, including water, mountain, desert, frozen, and forest terrain. They are known to be aggressive and are generally seen as vicious, destructive creatures. Wyverns and dragons are often confused. Much like the confusion between crocodiles and alligators, both dragons and wyverns, from a distance, look very similar. Upon closer inspection, however, they vary greatly. Dragons have six limbs – two pairs of legs and one pair of wings – while wyverns have only one pair of legs and one pair of wings. Despite wyverns being lesser known than dragons, they are still powerful predators of the land, sky, and sea. Having few limbs allows them to be more streamlined, so they are thought to fly at greater speeds than dragons.

• LINDSEY WAKEFIELD •

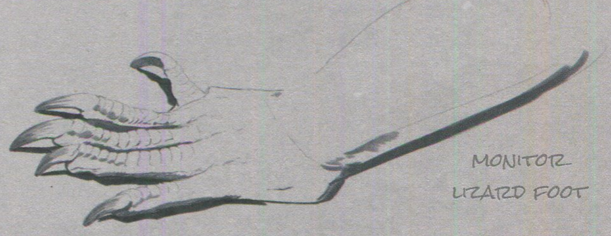
2D generalist • lindseyw.artstation.com

• FIELD NOTES •



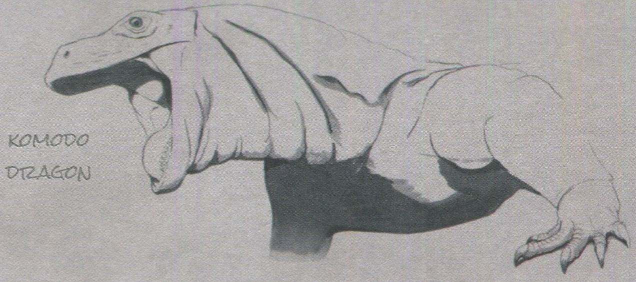
Bird feet

Wyvern are often seen with three-toed reptilian feet. Strange as it may initially sound, a great reference for reptile feet is bird feet! They have scales similar to reptiles and make more sense to reference when creating a potentially bipedal creature. I study an emu foot because it is the closest reference I know to theropod dinosaurs such as the tyrannosaurus rex or allosaurus. I like the idea of studying flightless birds' feet because it provides another lifestyle the wyvern could take. Instead of sharp claws for overpowering and grasping prey, the wyvern could potentially use its feet to walk and/or run.

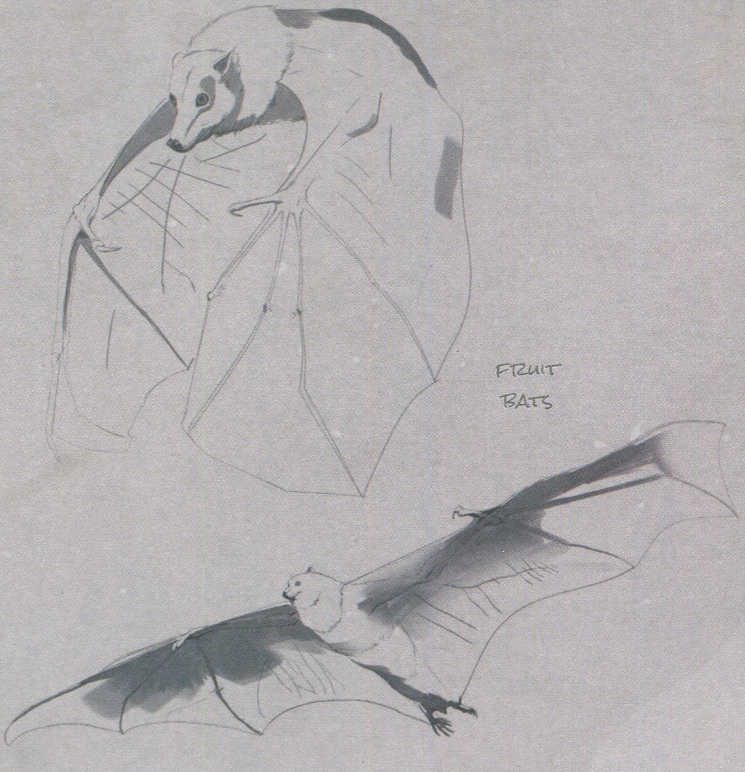


Monitor lizards

When I want to study reptilian claws that are not those of birds, I always choose to study monitor lizards. Monitor lizards are the largest lizard species. The biggest of the family is the komodo dragon, and the longest is the crocodile monitor lizard. For a voracious mythical creature like the wyvern, I like the idea of referencing these lizards because they are powerful predators. To me, reptile claws provide an excellent example of grasping, killing power because of their long, sharp claws.



Along with studying monitor lizard claws, I study a reptile's head and upper body. I like to think that the head of any creature should be given the most attention because that is what most people look at first. Important anatomical areas that a lot of people neglect on the head are the jaw muscles that attach to the lower and upper jaws. These give the creatures their jaw strength. It is always important to study anatomy in order to add more realism to the creature you are designing.



Fruit bats

Since I am creating a wyvern, the webbed wings will play a huge role in the anatomy. I therefore want to make sure I pay special attention to them. Bat wings are the best and only example of webbed wings in the real world, so I make sure I study them in different positions. I focus on different flying positions because it means I can see the full wing rather than it being folded up and hidden. Fruit bats, or flying foxes, are the largest bats in the world so they offer an excellent reference for powerful wyvern wings.

It is important to study the underlying anatomy of bats as well, and understand how their flight anatomy differs from bird anatomy. As you will see on page 297, bat wings are essentially human arms with very long fingers, which allow for a flexible surface area for flight.

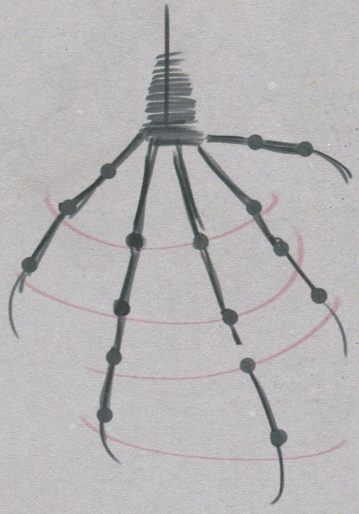
Reptilian claws

To draw reptilian forelimbs I start with lines that represent each digit, and then divide each line with small circles to represent the knuckles. This structure is very similar to the human hand, the only difference being longer and additional bones on some of the reptilian digits. It can be useful to draw a shallow U-shape to make sure the knuckles are lined up correctly. I look at my own hand to see this in real life – the middle knuckles do not follow a straight line but gently curve.

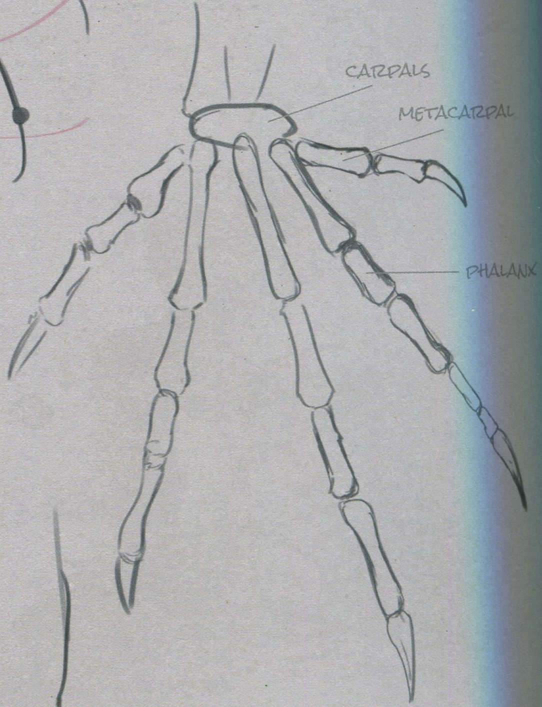
The next step, after creating a rough line layout for the claws, is to draw in the skeleton. It doesn't have to be perfect, but it helps me to see more of the form of the claw itself. Reptilian claws tend to have very little fat and muscle, maybe only having pads underneath for walking, so a skeleton is a good structure to use for form layout. My only focus when drawing the skeleton is the metacarpals and phalanges. The carpals themselves, when fully fleshed out, will only appear as a roundish bony mass, so unless I am creating a skeleton concept or studying anatomy, I tend to just draw a spherical mass there to represent the carpals.

The final step for the reptilian claw is to flesh out the details by putting the skin on top of the skeleton, and since it is a reptilian claw, I have to add the scales. For reptilian claws, I like to add just the top layer of scales to the claws, because adding every single scale makes the claw too heavy with detail. Keeping it simple creates graphic harmony and makes it visually pleasing for the eye.

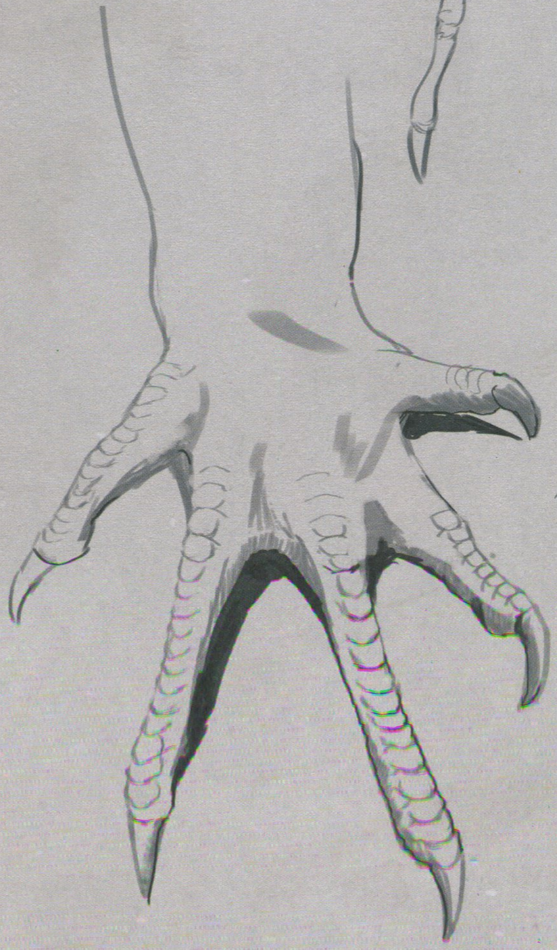
In addition, I like to add a bit of shading to give my drawing a bit more depth and emphasis to certain areas. The great part about reptilian claws is that there are so many out there to practice with; you can give any reptilian creature you are designing a new level of uniqueness.



USING A U-SHAPE TO PLACE THE KNUCKLES



BUILDING UP THE UNDERLYING SKELETON



ADDING THE TOP LAYER OF SCALES

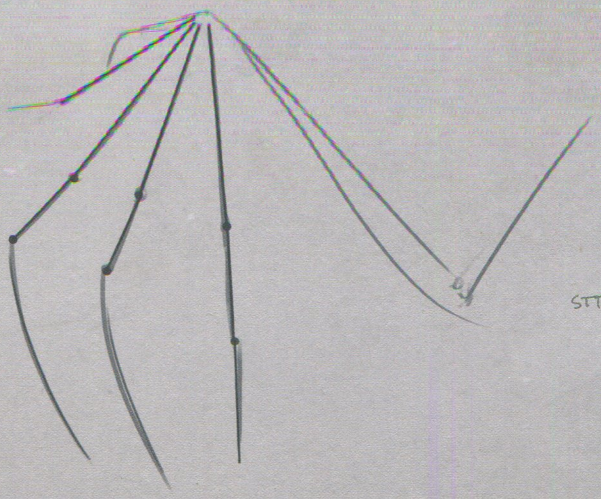
Webbed wings

Much like reptilian claws, I start webbed wings by building a quick structural frame. Webbed wings require some type of structure to support the webbing, and for bats that is essentially the equivalent of human hands and arms, just lengthened to an extreme. If you look, most dragon anatomy follows bat anatomy in this regard, but then is detailed with reptilian features like claws and scales.

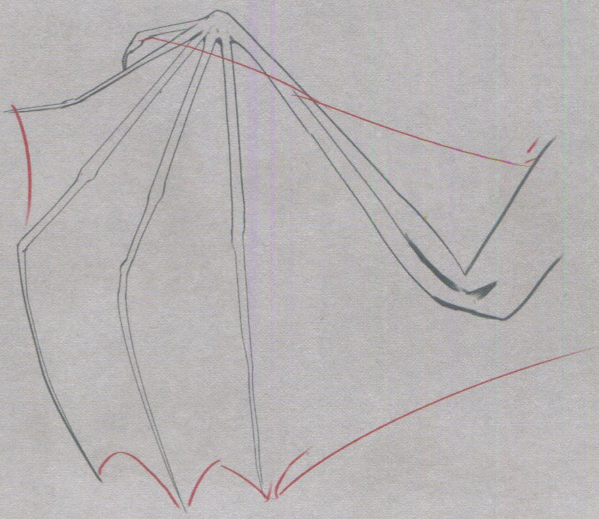
I first lay out the structure as I did for the claw, ensuring every knuckle follows the U-shape pattern. Another thing to note is that, along with the U-shape of the knuckles, bones are never straight and actually have a curve to them. You can see I emphasize this with the wing fingertips.

After a basic skeleton-building phase, I start to lay the skin over the bone structure. The webbing of webbed wings connects to certain key points on the hand and arm area. I think of these areas like anchors for the webbing that allows the creature to fly. Relating back to human anatomy, the wing skin connects from the base of the thumb to the biceps of the upper arm, between each finger tip, and then finally connects to the lower portion of the torso. It helps to use references when tackling anatomy that is difficult like this.

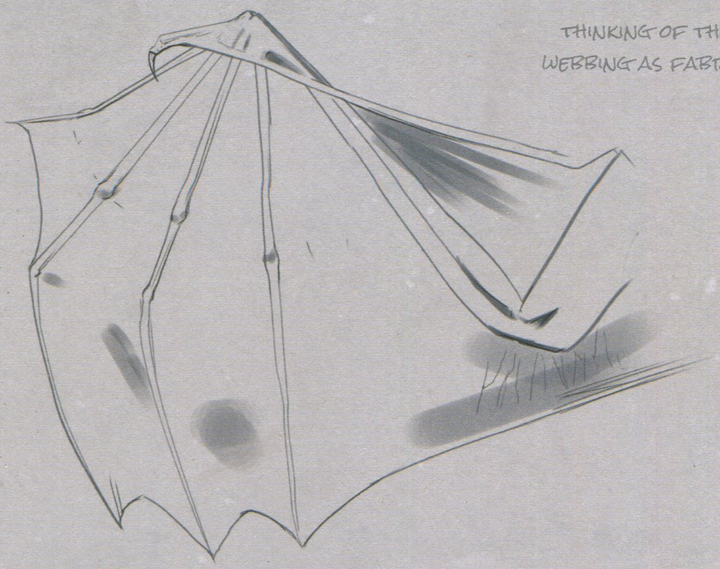
The final step is to refine the drawing and add shading. The webbing of the wing acts much like fabric, and stretches and folds depending on whether the creature is flying or resting. Although I don't do it here, you could incorporate reptilian features, or even feathers, into your webbed wings to give them a unique distinction from bats. You could also make the fingertip ends into claws and create a winged reptilian hand. The possibilities are endless when it comes to concepting creatures. Again, don't be afraid to use reference when drawing; it shortens the amount of time you need to make something and adds to your own visual library.



BUILDING A STRUCTURAL FRAME



WORKING OUT WHERE SKIN CONNECTS TO BONE



THINKING OF THE WEBBING AS FABRIC

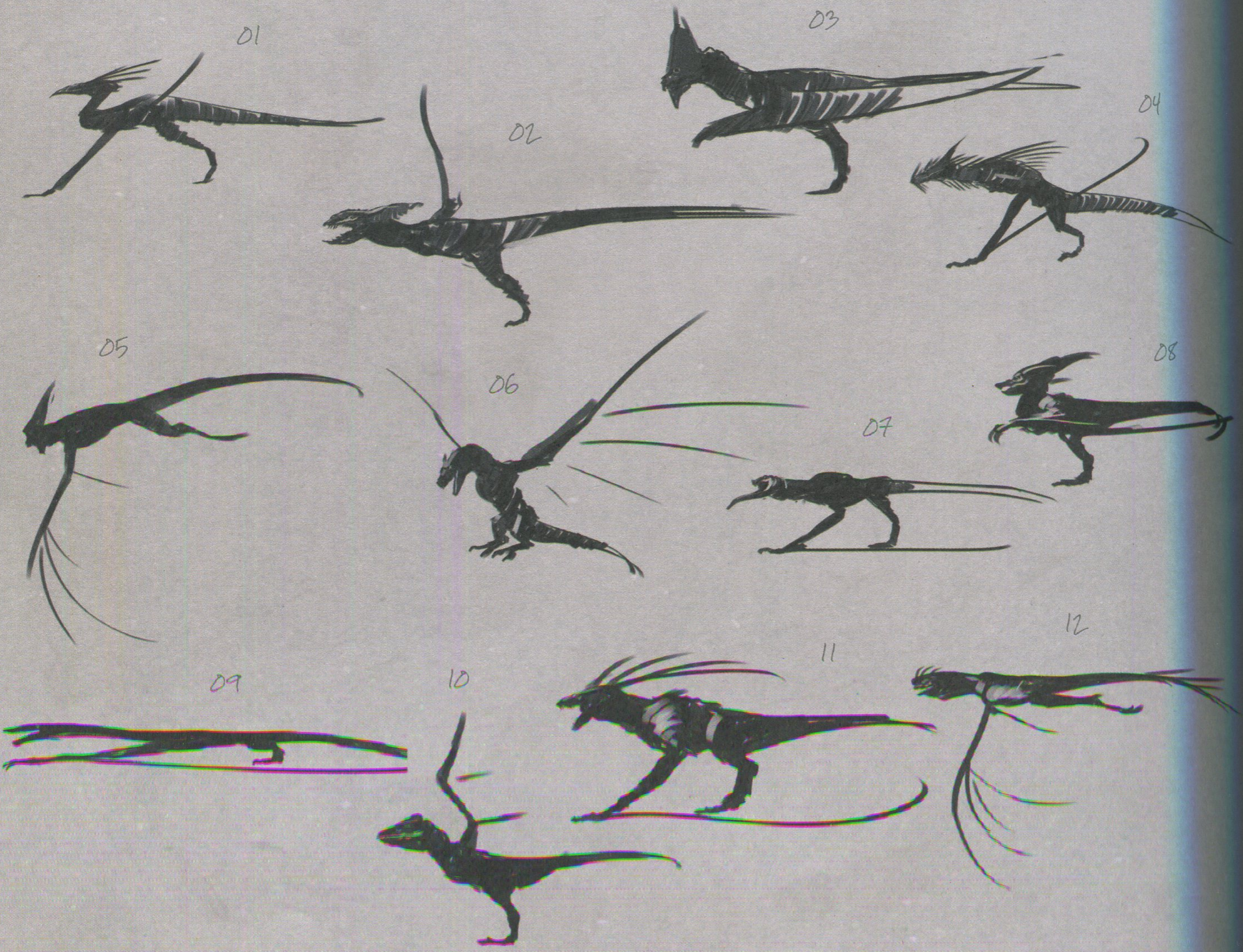
• DESIGN PROCESS •

Thumbnails

The thumbnailing process is one of my favorite stages, where I can be loose and quick with my drawings. When I draw thumbnails I typically use a black silhouette with very little detail. When I find a silhouette that I like the most I will detail it further. This stage explores the overall shape and form of the creature rather than focusing on the details.

I started by scribbling my shapes, beginning with the head and following through with the rest of the body. I explored the idea of the wyvern acting more like a quadruped rather than a biped, which I liked, but decided to stray from that idea because it wasn't quite right and did not look distinctly wyvern. I also explored the idea of making the wyvern essentially a dinosaur with wings, which I love, but felt it was not original enough.

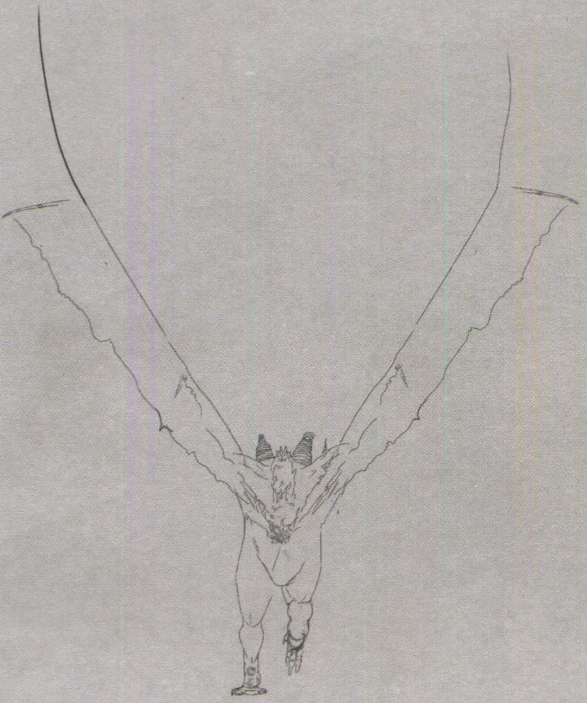
I explored the idea of a longer-necked wyvern; however, I decided to leave this because it didn't interest me as much as the other concepts. I basically wanted a creature that was easily identifiable as a wyvern, but that was unique. I settled on thumbnail 05 as my basic inspiration, because the idea of a bat-like wyvern intrigues me.

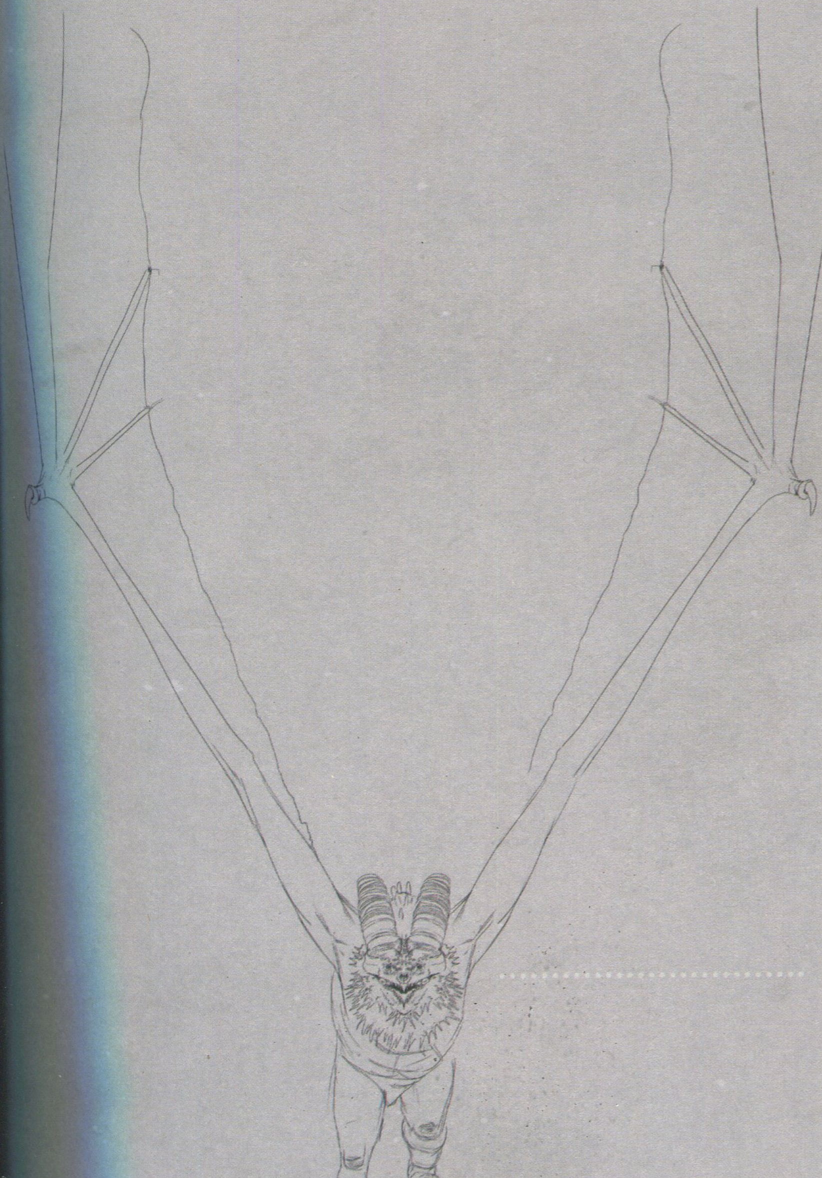


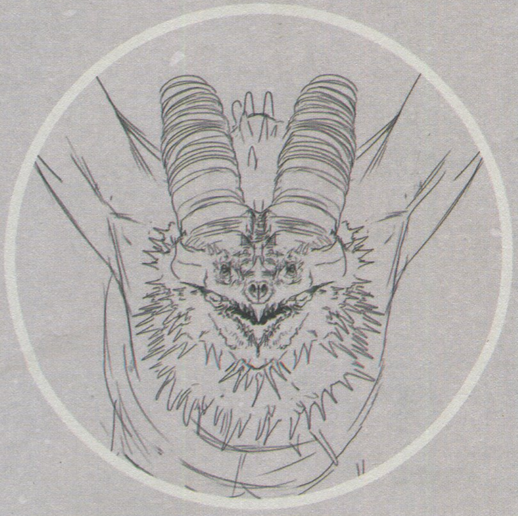
Further exploration

I like the idea of this wyvern being a master of the sky and land, and a very powerful predator, so I gave it powerful legs to support its body and massive wings so that it can fly with ease. From the front the face is reminiscent of an alligator snapping turtle, which is a brilliant creature to study. You can see the strong reptilian legs and huge bat-like wingspan in the sketches below.

Drawing creatures from the front and back can be difficult. I need to make sure the anatomy remains believable from all angles, especially with the wings and legs. I think I can improve the view from behind by looking at more references. The tail is not very distinguishable from the rest of the body and the wings look a little odd. However, you can see the horns that I added to give the wyvern an ancient look.



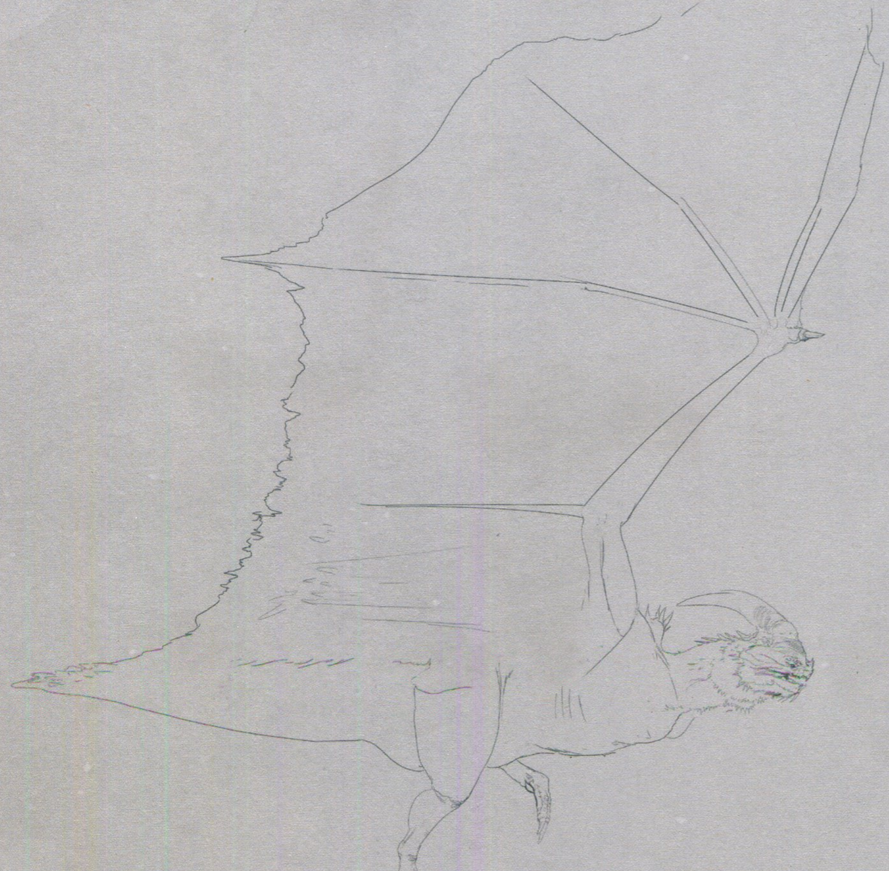


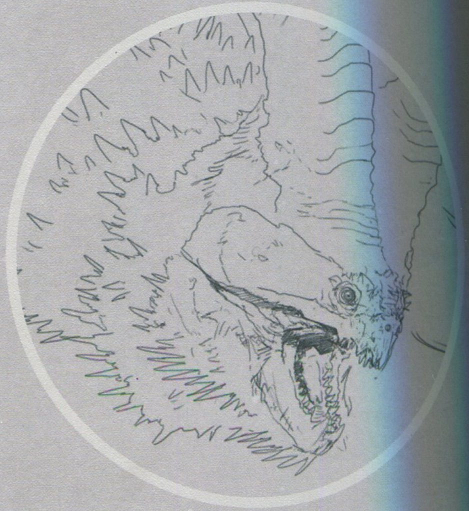


Poses

Sketching the wyvern from the side perspective with the wings raised makes me realize that I am not entirely happy with the head and neck at this stage, so I will continue to work on these elements. I also note that the tail needs separating from the wings more so that it remains a serpentine tail as described in mythical recollections.

The second sketch here shows the wyvern in a threatening ground pose, where whatever has approached the wyvern is met with a mouth full of sharp teeth. What I like about this pose is that the head is the focus of attention, and that features of the body, like the wings, lead to the eye and mouth. What I dislike about this pose is that it does not show off the rest of the body as it is hidden by the wings.





• SUBSPECIES •

Vampire wyvern

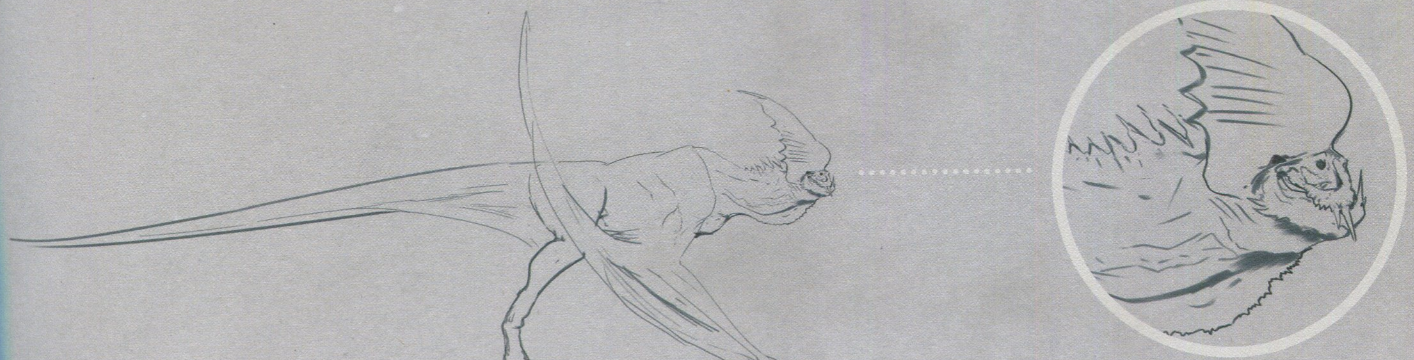
The vampire wyvern is so called because of its fearsome-looking needle-like fangs. For a very long time it was believed that these terrifying beasts fed on human blood. However, thanks to brave cryptozoologists we know that they use those fangs to snatch other flying creatures out of the air. The horns are used for navigation and locating prey. Unlike other subspecies of wyvern, this breed uses its wings for walking as well as flying. The wings are short and pointed, allowing the beast to easily perform aerial acrobatics.

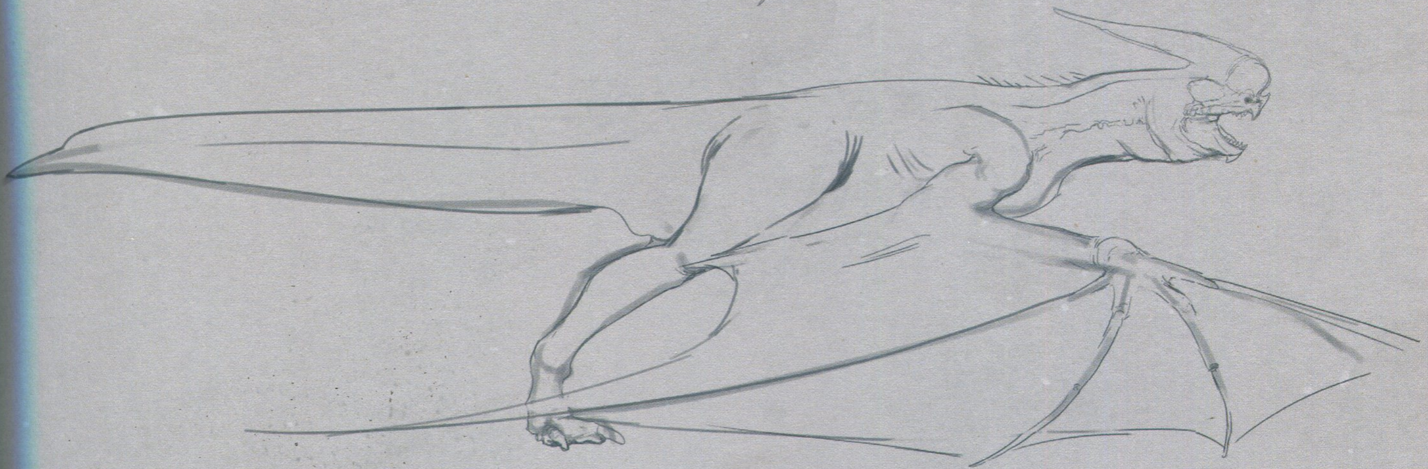
Great wyvern

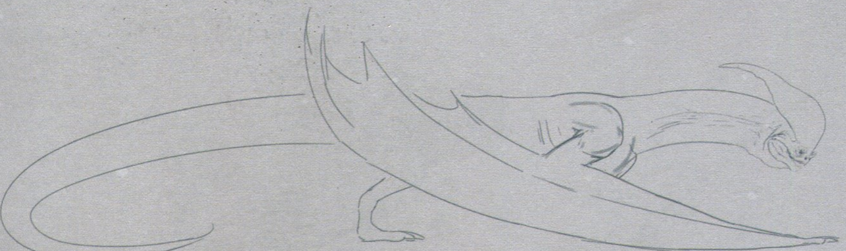
The great wyvern is one of the largest known subspecies. Due to its immense size it needs to take a running start just to launch itself off the ground. It is theorized that the sheer mass of the beast means that it rarely takes to the skies in full flight; rather it takes short gliding leaps across land. There is a hard bony structure on the wyvern's head, similar to that found on a snapping turtle. It is not known what function this serves, but it has been speculated that it is used for fighting competitors during the mating season.

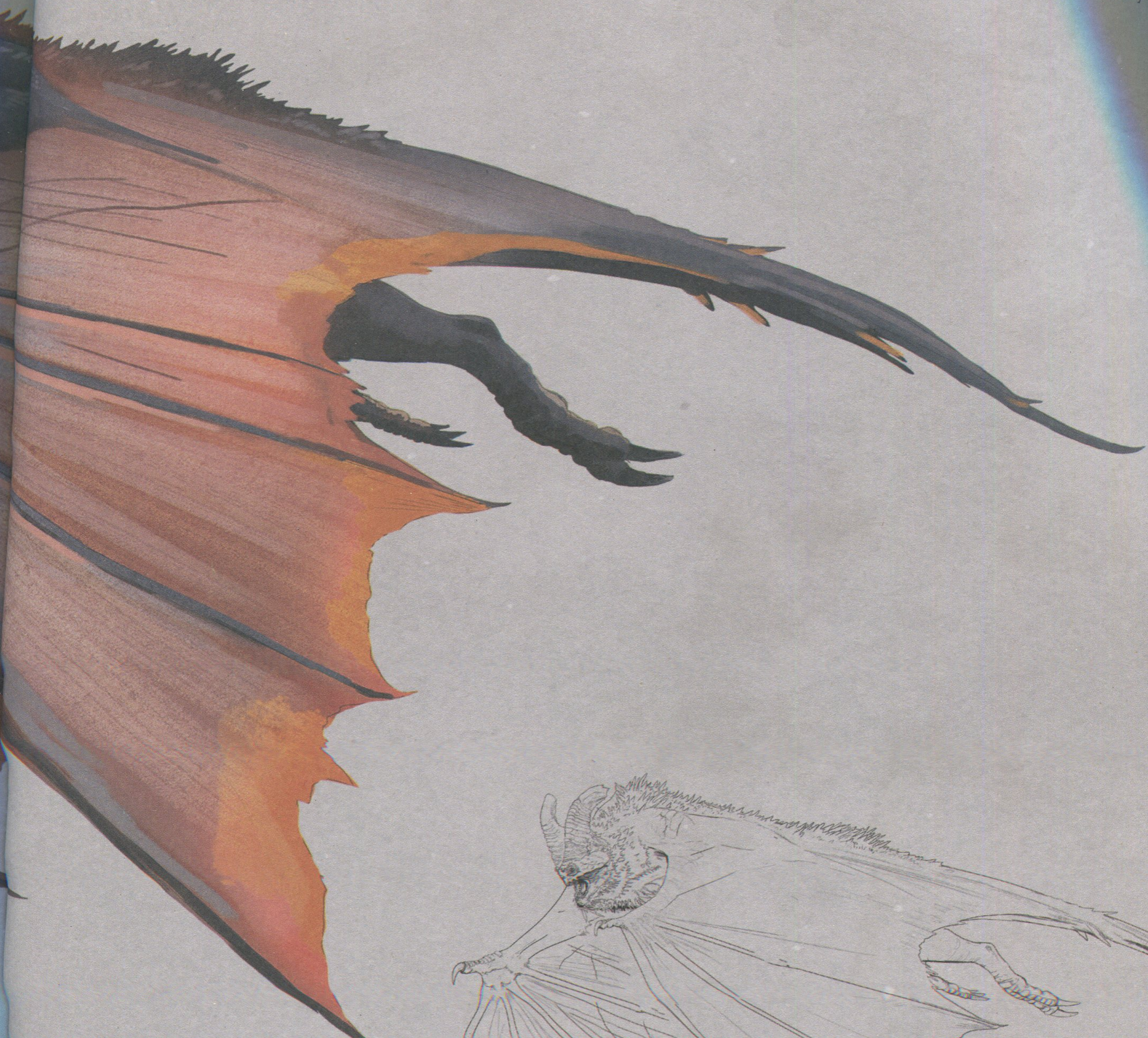
Helmet-headed wyvern

This variety of wyvern is thought to be closely related to the great wyvern, although it is much smaller and far more agile in the air. The large head structure is hollow inside and aids in vocalization during mating displays. They are incredibly awkward on land due to the disproportionately large wings and tail. However, once it takes to the air it becomes stunning to watch. When a flock of these creatures passes overhead the sight is breathtaking due to the spectacular aerial ballet they perform when flying together.

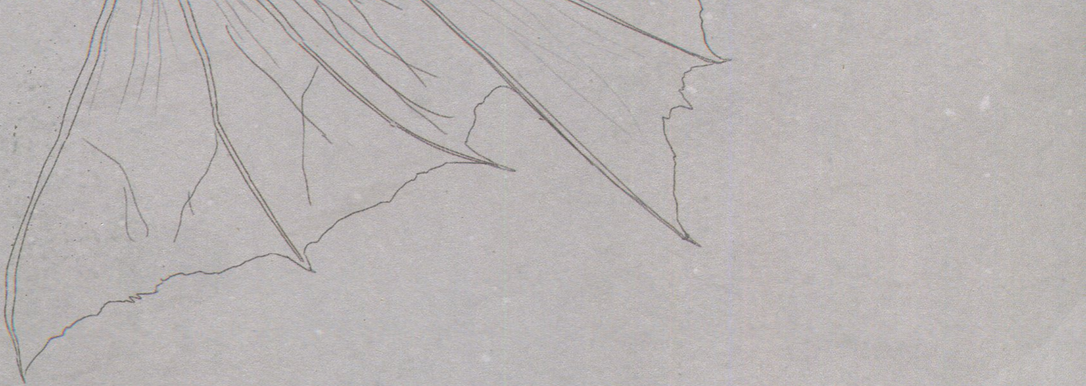




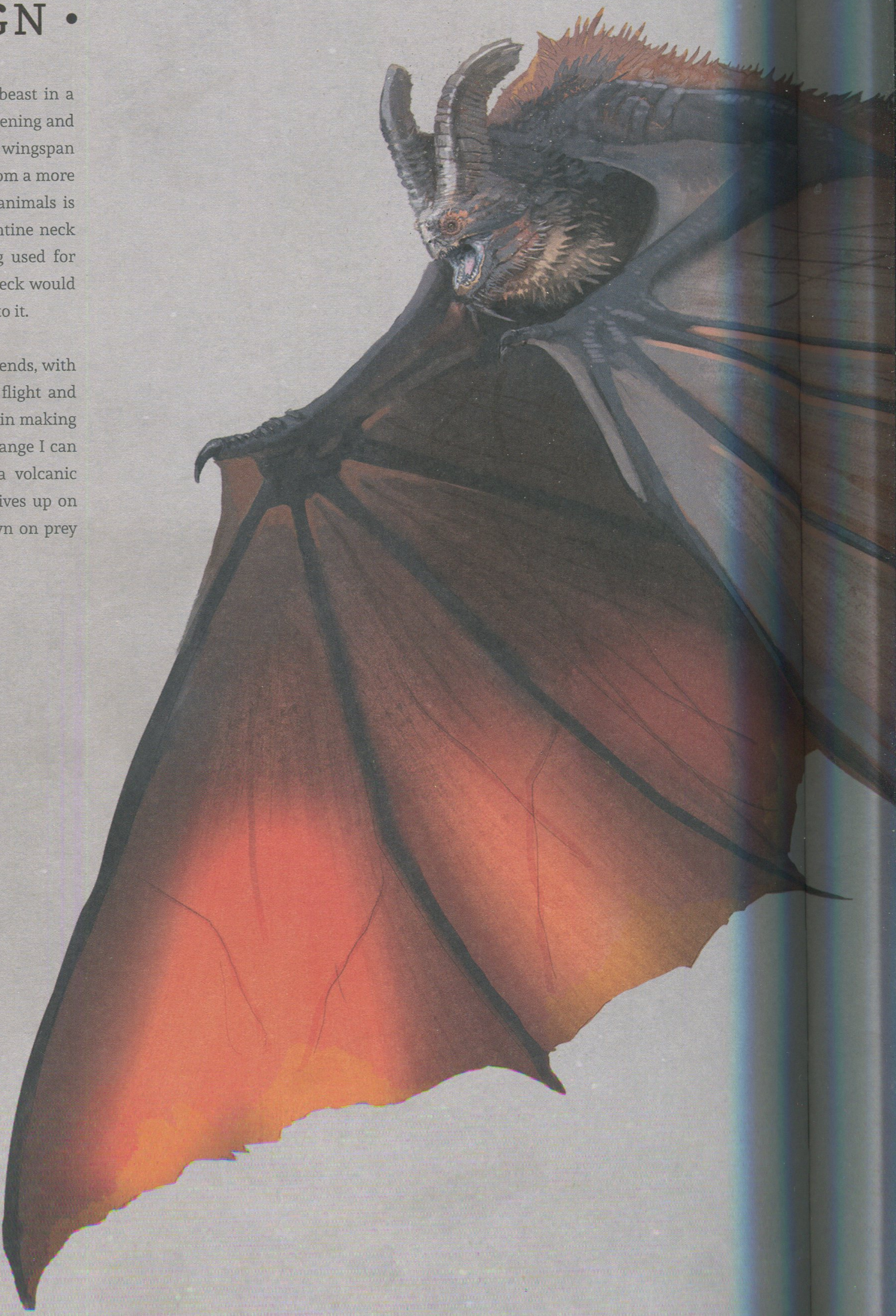




Final image © Lindsey Wakefield



• FINAL DESIGN •

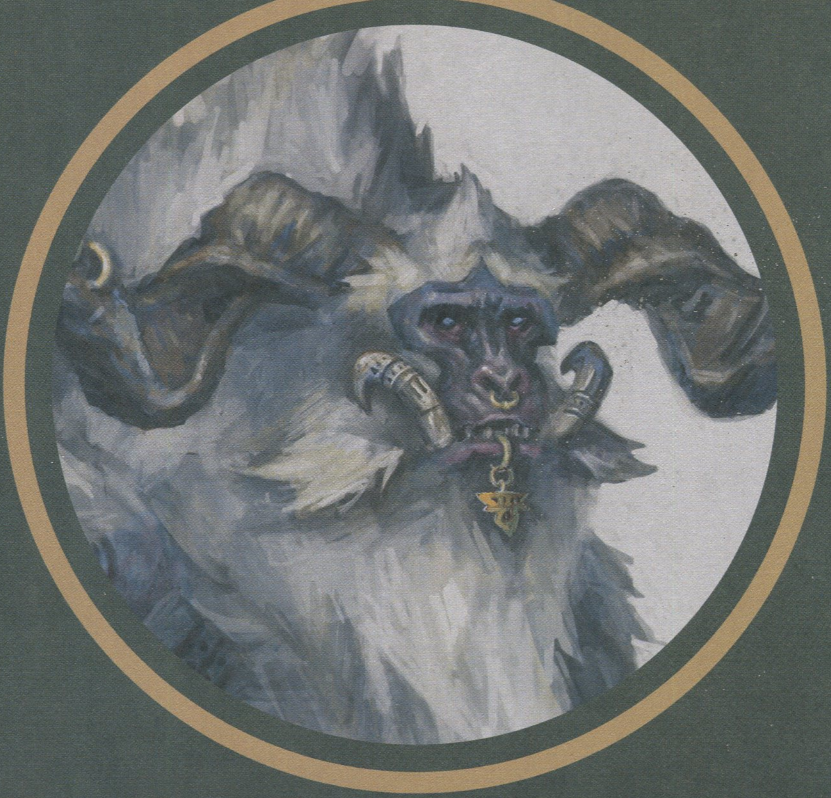


The final design of the wyvern shows the beast in a flying, predatory pose. It appears as a threatening and intimidating mythical monster, with its huge wingspan and barbed tail. The reptilian head stems from a more bat-like body, and the mixing of different animals is truly terrifying. I discarded the long serpentine neck because I like the idea of the horns being used for ramming as a defense mechanism; a long neck would easily break with that kind of force applied to it.

The wyvern's anatomy is reflective of its legends, with the forelimbs being used as a method for flight and the back legs used for land. The colors help in making the wyvern look archaic; using gray and orange I can show that this wyvern perhaps lives in a volcanic environment. I imagine that this wyvern lives up on high, rocky volcanic cliffs and swoops down on prey that is unaware of its presence from above.

Key facts

Name: Wyvern
Taxonomy: Lizard, snake, bat
Region: Europe
Habitat: Various
Mythical abilities: Venomous bite
Threat to humans: 3



• YETI •

The yeti is an ape-like creature, strongly embedded in Nepali folklore and mythology, typically said to dwell in the Himalayan mountain range. Other names include the Abominable Snowman and meh-teh. Few have seen a yeti, and those who have give varying accounts of its nature; some say it is a ravenous, violent beast, stalking the mountain slopes for fresh meat. Others claim the yeti is a benevolent creature, a guardian of holy sites on the mountain that are too remote for monks and priests to tend to; some believe it is even worshipped by locals. Often seen standing on two legs, taller than a human, and with long hair on its head, many rumor the yeti to in fact be an unfamiliar breed of bear, with gray or reddish fur.

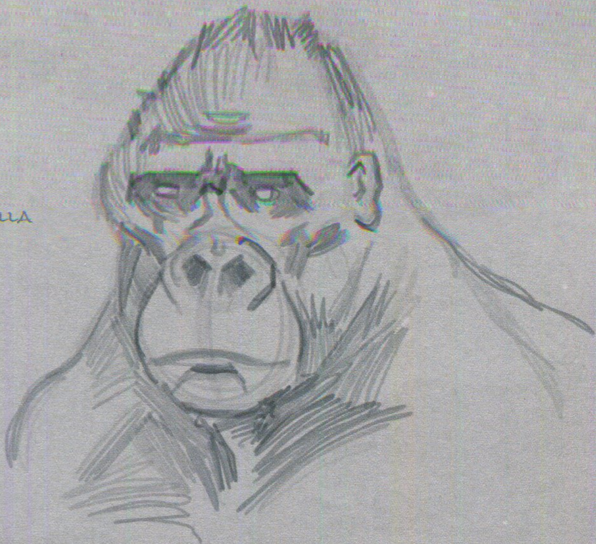
• TOM BABBEY •

Illustrator & art instructor • theencroachingwilds.com

• FIELD NOTES •

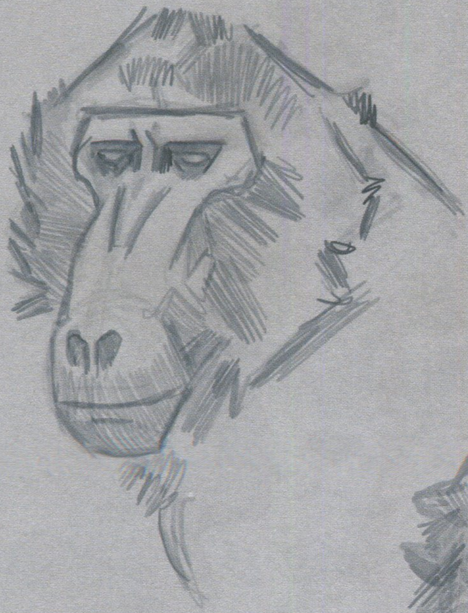
Gorillas

As apes are our closest relatives, we often empathize and feel a connection when we look at their facial features. Because of this, I will focus a large amount of my effort on developing the yeti's facial structure. The faces of the great apes, such as the gorilla, are what come to mind when people think of ape men such as the yeti. While the gorilla is a great starting point for my designs, I want to explore a bit beyond the obvious inspirations for the yeti.



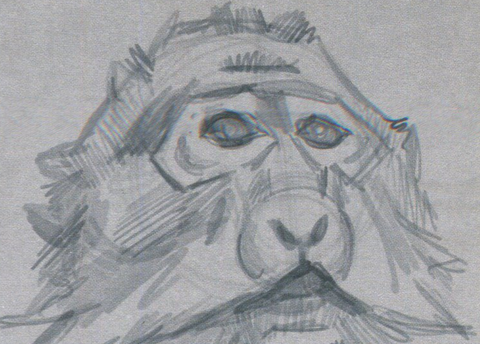
Baboons

The elongated face of a baboon would give the yeti's features a more savage look. I will need to take care while incorporating elements of a baboon face into the design, as the lengthy muzzle of the primate can read more canine than I would prefer, especially when removed from its real-world context and applied to a fantasy creature.



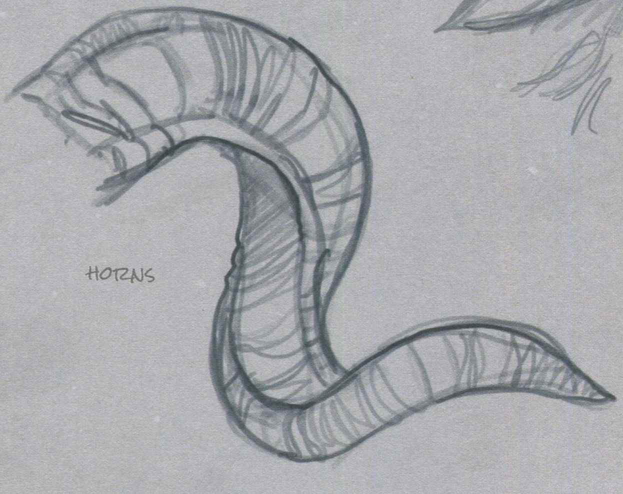
Macaques

To help keep that primate element, I will balance the far-forward nose of the baboon with the brow ridge and fur patterns of the macaque monkey. A hint of this monkey in the design will help to solidly plant the facial features in the primate realm. Likewise, the whimsical facial hair of the macaque monkey will give my design a charming edge. This will balance out the savageness of the baboon's muzzle just enough to give the design a benevolent yet intimidating look.



Goat horns

While I will be drawing my inspiration from primates in the main, I need to reach a bit further in my research in order to guarantee that the final yeti design reads as a mythological creature, and not simply a new kind of ape. The twisted, gnarled horns of a goat will help towards placing the creature solidly in the realm of the fantastic.

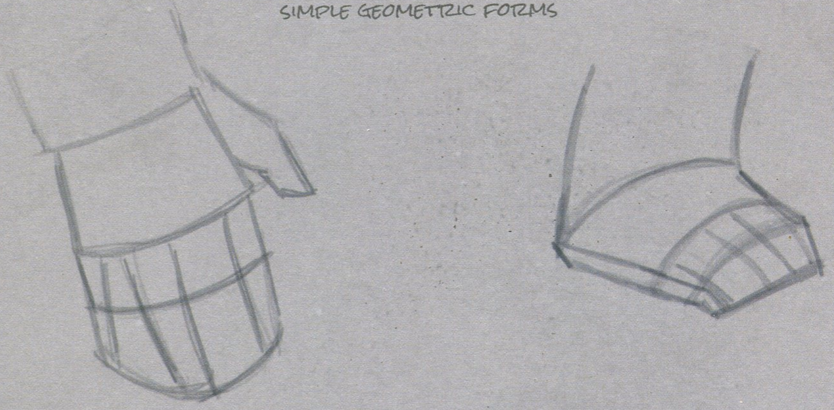


Hands and feet

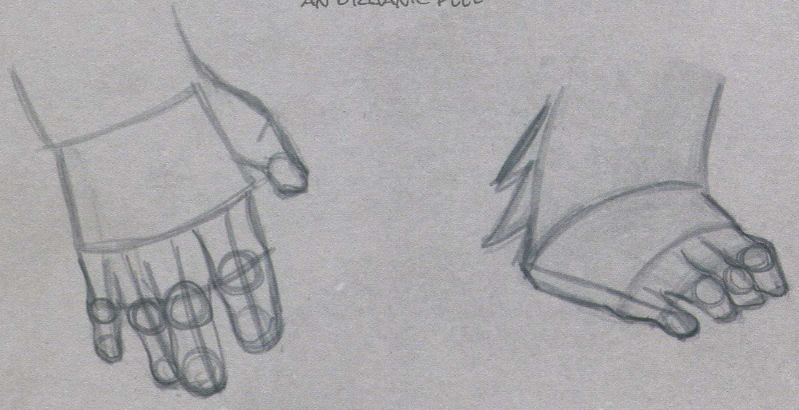
The human-like hands and feet of the yeti have the potential to be troublesome if not approached properly. While hands are often thought of as an overly complex feature to draw, once broken down into simple geometric forms they become quite manageable. I begin my hand construction by thinking of the hand as a geometric mitt, then move on to the foot. It is well known that apes have hand-like feet, and because of this I approach the feet in much the same way, starting with a mitt-like structure once more. This time however I plant the shape solidly on the ground, at a near 90-degree angle to the leg.

With the mitts now established, I break down the forms further. I have already established the sweeping line that the knuckles and finger joints will sit at on the hand, and I now round them out to give a more organic feel. I also carve away the areas between the fingers, to give definition to the individual digits. With the feet I pay special attention to the angle of the toes in relation to the ground plane. Angling them towards the ground further gives the impression that these toes are finger-like and dexterous.

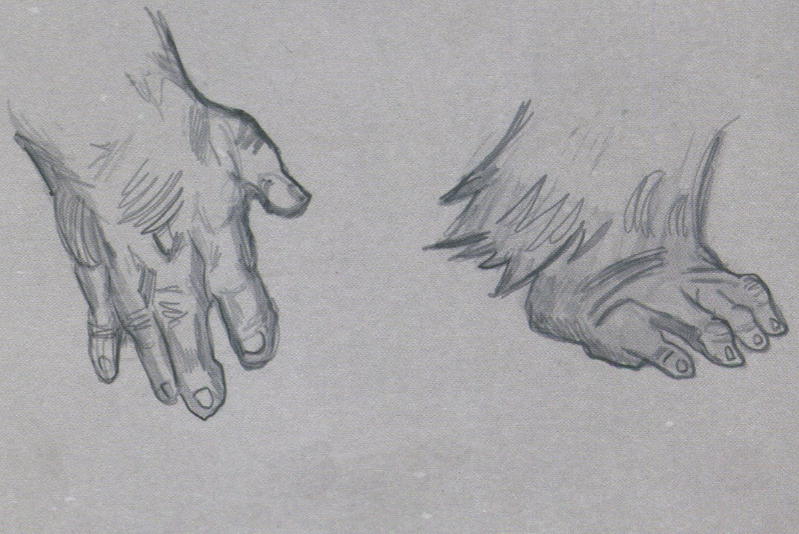
As I approach the final hand and foot, I pay attention to proportions. By making the fingers (and palm) longer or shorter than a human's, I can give the impression that the hand belongs to a new creature, not to man. In this instance, I opt to make the fingers heavy and short to give the impression of strength. As I close to a finish on the foot, I am careful not to make the toes too long. The feet of the great apes are generally smaller than the hands. I also want to be sure that the overall aesthetic of the foot matches that of the hand. As such, I make sure the toes are equally as heavy and short as the fingers.



BREAKING COMPLEX SHAPES INTO
SIMPLE GEOMETRIC FORMS



ROUNDING OUT THE SHAPES FOR
AN ORGANIC FEEL



ADJUSTING PROPORTIONS TO
ENHANCE THE PRIMATE ELEMENT

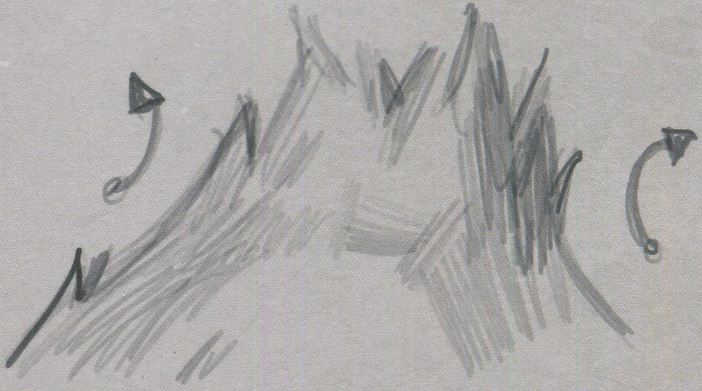
Wild fur

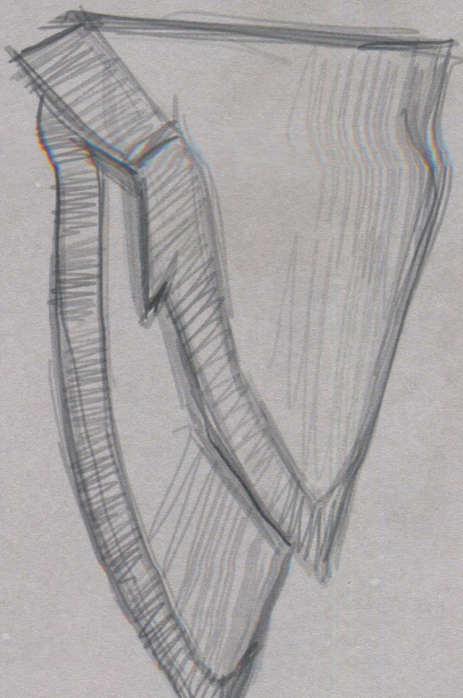
The fur of the yeti will be a prominent feature in the design, and as such care must be taken when approaching it. In addition to a heavy beard, the yeti will sport a mane-like ridge of fur on its back. This stiff, upward-growing hair must follow the contour of the back, and flair out at the edges, kicking out into irregular locks of hair. I will need to ensure that the individual tufts do not become too uniform, taking extra effort to vary the shapes of the tufts in order to give a wild, reckless appearance.

The beard, as arguably the most prominent of the fur features, must be treated with the same reverence that I will give the face, as it will essentially be an extension of the head and thus be a focal point for the viewer. To make sure the beard doesn't appear flat or devoid of mass, I sketch the beard as a series of solid, geometric shapes that overlap one another. This will help maintain the three-dimensional feel and volume that should be present in the thick beard of fur and hair.

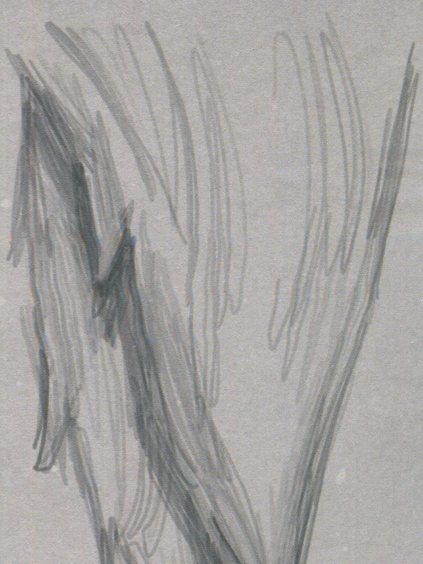
Once the three-dimensional construction of the beard is mapped out, I then round out the form. I add indications of hair to the solid structure, which will help to inform the viewer that the beard is a mass of thick fur, without having to render each individual hair. Rounding out the edges of the once-geometric shapes of the beard gives the soft, rolling feel I want with each of the individual beard layers.

ENSURING THE HAIR LOOKS WILD FOR THE MANE





THE BEARD NEEDS TO APPEAR VOLUMINOUS



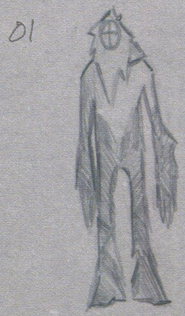
ROUNDING OUT THE BEARD LAYERS

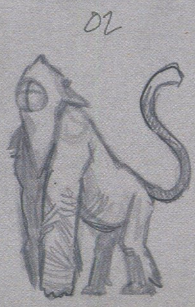
• DESIGN PROCESS •

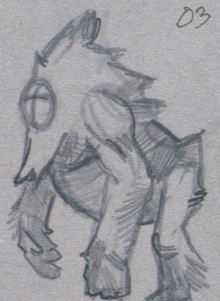
Thumbnails

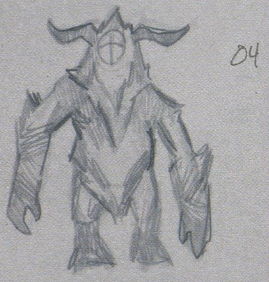
I consider thumbnail sketches to be one of the most important phases in the creature design process, despite the fact that it is one of the quickest phases. I kept these individual thumbnails quick and loose, and actively avoided going into too much detail in this phase. Thumbnails should be about idea exploration and big shapes: I played around with large silhouettes, interesting shape combinations, and the immediate read of the overall form, and nothing more. I experimented with stature and using gorilla and monkey features to varying degrees.

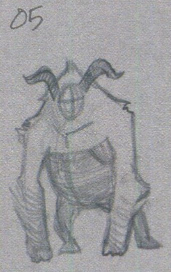
For most of the thumbnails the upper body is quite heavy, which creates the impression of a hulking figure. I wanted to make sure the fur was a noticeable element in the silhouette, as this is one of the common features described by explorers. I like the two options with the visible monkey-like tails (02 and 07), but feel that these need to incorporate the more looming, top-heavy elements of the other designs in order to convey the height and intimidation factor of a yeti. I also like the options with horns as they add interest to the silhouette. They also make it clear that the yeti is not just a regular primate.

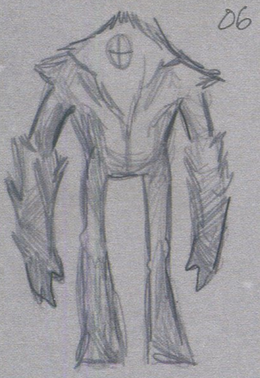


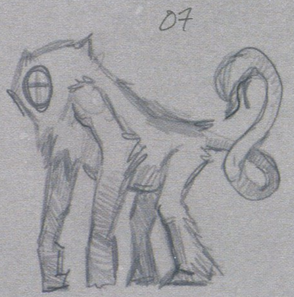


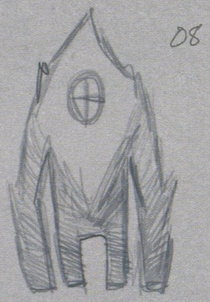


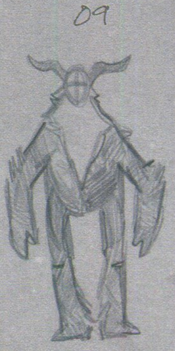


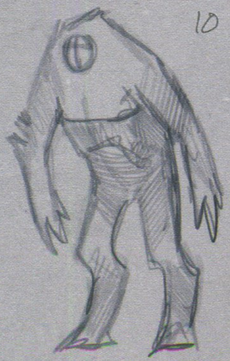


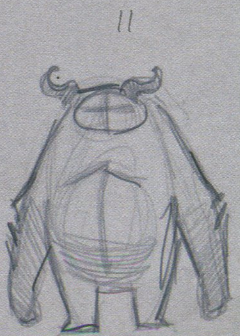


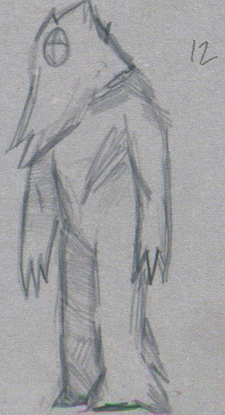






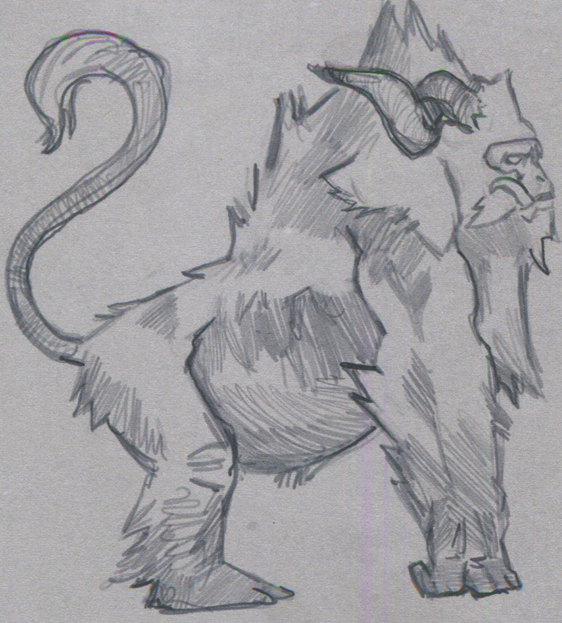




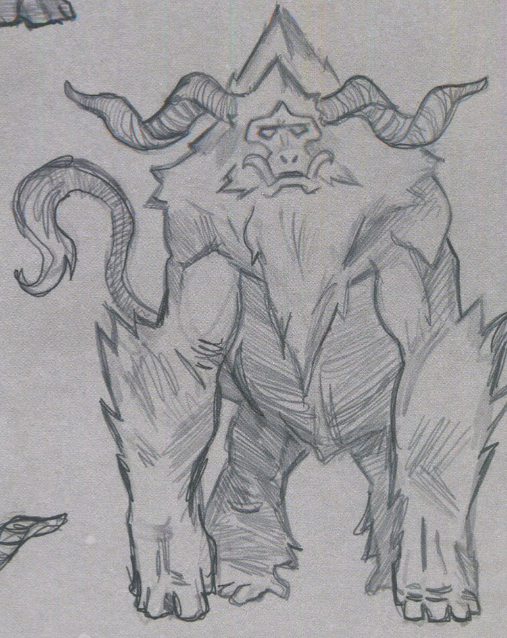


Further exploration

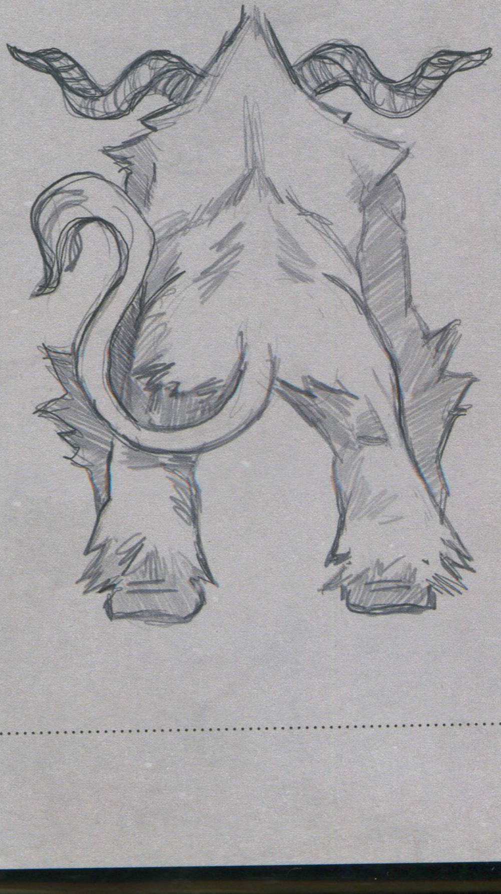
I settled on a heavy-bodied look, similar to a gorilla, with the elegant tail sweep of a baboon. In profile, you can see the tall mane on the back and the long shaggy beard that helps differentiate the yeti from a real-world ape. The arms are strong and muscular, and it looks capable of standing on two feet, as many of the recollections indicate the yeti can do. The decision to include tusks is rooted in the iconic imagery of Asian mythology. Many creatures in Asian folklore (such as the Oni) are depicted with outward-curving tusks. As the yeti is one of the most famous myths of the Himalayan region, it seemed only suitable to tie in its physical traits with the well-known visual tropes present in Asian mythological art.



The heavy, thick-set arms are even more evident from a front view. These arms are not simply for tool manipulation, but for locomotion as well, helping the beast to propel itself forward. The yeti leans with its weight on its arms when not in motion. The distinctive curvy horns are also more obvious when examining the creature from the front, and add to the fantastic nature of the yeti. The macaque brow is quite intimidating, and has an ancient look to it that roots the beast in history.



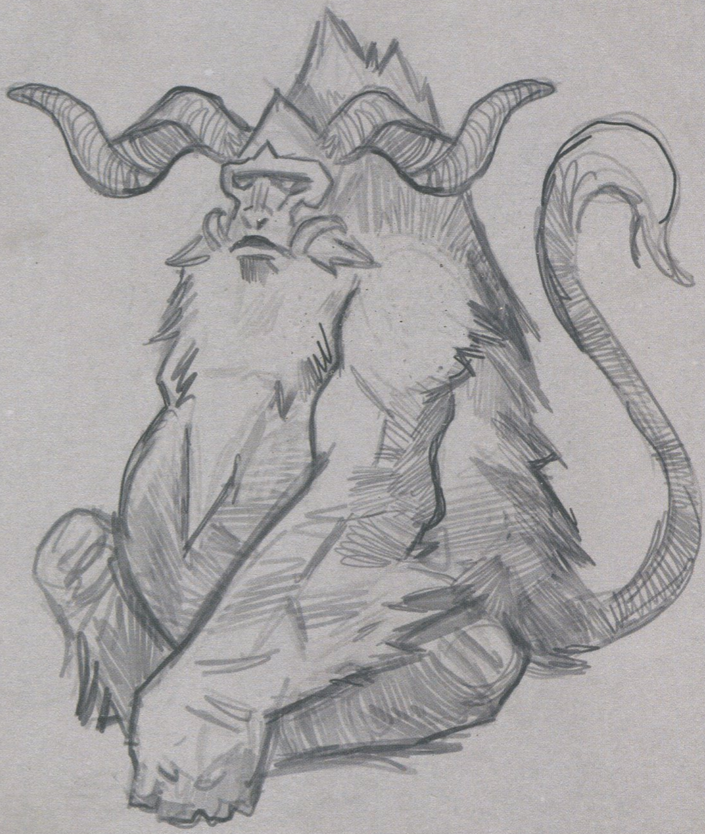
From behind you can clearly see the swooshing tail, which adds a sense of motion to the beast. It also adds contrast against the yeti's thick, wide-set body. The twisting horns and peak of fur at the top of the head are again notable in this view. The outline of the thick fur creates an imposing silhouette, and seems fitting for something that resides in a cold environment.

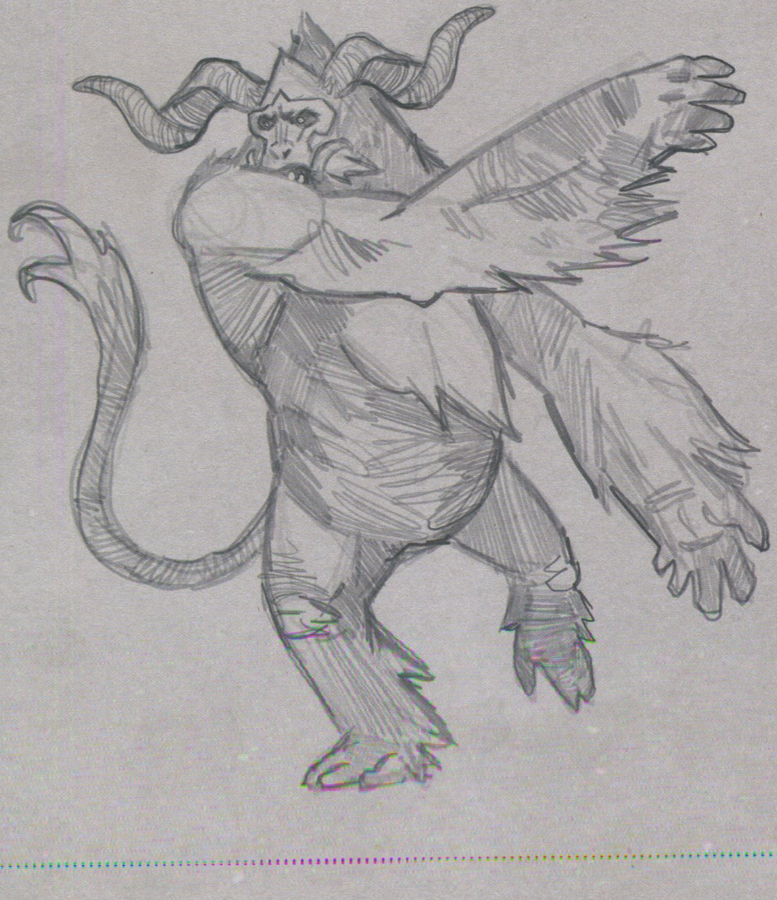


Poses

The yeti is capable of many moods, and I wanted to convey that in these loose, exploratory pose sketches. Though imposing, I imagine that most of the time the yeti is a gentle creature that feeds on sparse mountain vegetation. As such, it conserves its energy and spends most of its time sitting about. The yeti looks relaxed and almost meditative in this first pose, which fits with those accounts relating the yeti to religious beliefs of some Himalayan people.

Of course, when pushed to anger, the yeti transforms from peaceful mountain dweller to savage foe. In the second sketch I wanted to explore what a yeti in full rage would look like, and try to convey the terror a mountain climber may feel when they push the beast too far. To maintain the flow of the charging pose, I kept the sketch loose and gestural, which helps to give a sense of motion. You can imagine the power behind one of those gigantic muscular arms.





• SUBSPECIES •

Steppe yeti

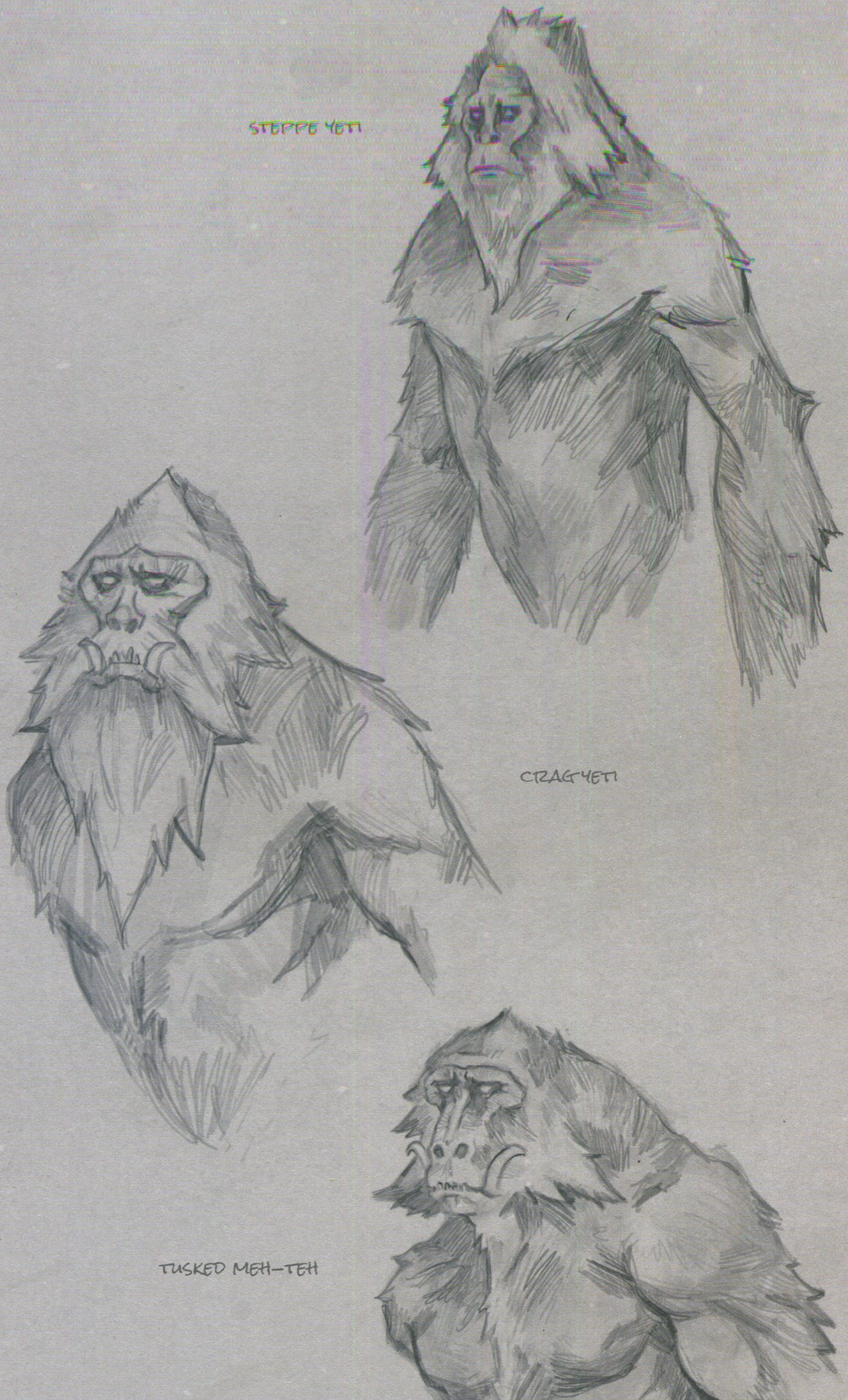
The exceedingly shy steppe yeti is the only yeti that has been spotted outside the mountain heights, having been seen occasionally wandering the remote foothills and arid, frigid steppes of central Asia. This subspecies is the most human-like of the yetis, and individuals have been known to form special bonds with remote villages, keeping their distance and staying out of site but protecting them from predators in exchange for offerings of honeyed milk and simple trinkets.

Crag yeti

The brutish crag yeti, better known by its more informal title, The Abominable Snowman, is the bane of mountain travelers and climbers. Its howling call is often mistaken for the sound of the bitter mountain winds passing through the crags where it dwells. By the time its target realizes the true source of the noise, it is almost always too late.

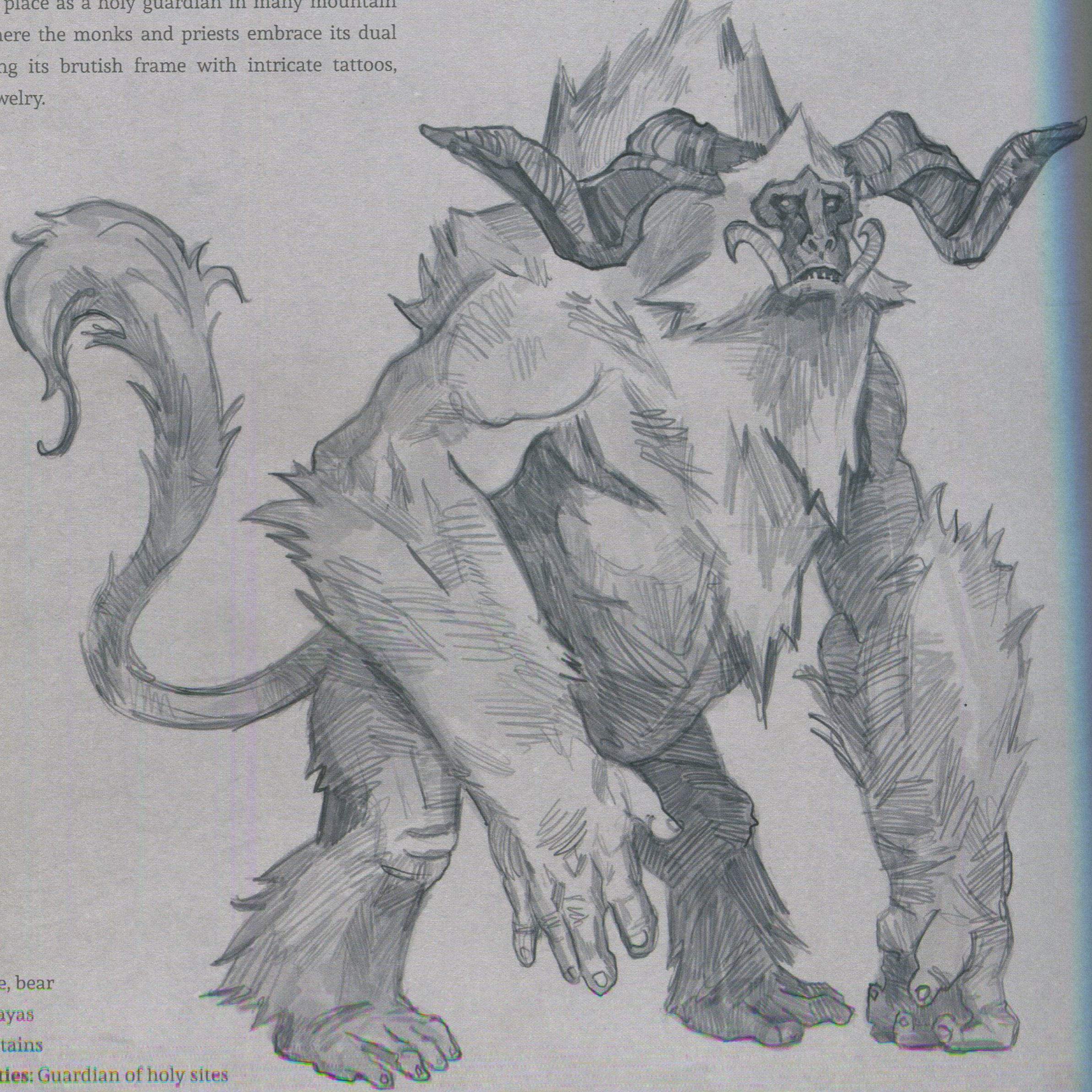
Tusked meh-teh

The tusked meh-teh is the most social of the yeti species, and indeed is the only yeti known to live in family groups. These social groups lay claim to their own mountain spring, which they will fiercely defend from rival family groups. The dominant males of the groups, sporting large, outward-curving tusks that sprout from their baboon-like muzzles, are the contenders in these fights. The losers of these fights are cast out of the family groups and live the rest of their life in solitude, while the winner lays claim to the new hot spring and welcomes the family of the defeated into his own tribe.



• FINAL DESIGN •

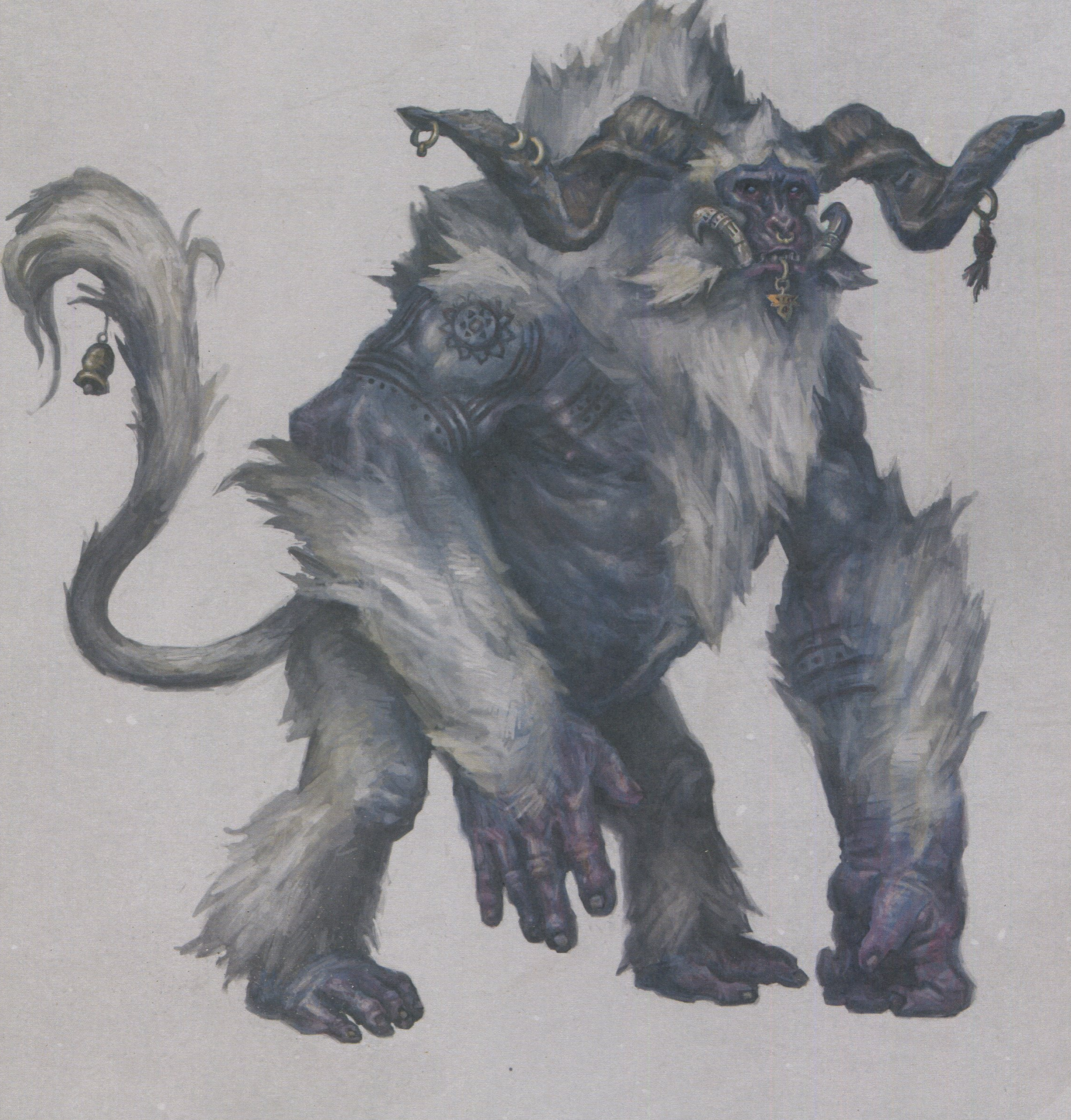
The yeti, in all of its glory, is an imposing and breathtaking creature. Its massive shoulders and powerful arms support its equally heavy horned head. Its shaggy coat protects it from the harsh elements of the mountains it calls home. I chose white and gray fur coupled with blue skin to reflect its cold home environment and mythical nature. I also decided to add some decorative elements to the color version. The yeti is a beast of contradiction: it is a creature possessing vast destructive capabilities, yet its inherent gentle disposition has earned it a place as a holy guardian in many mountain sanctuaries, where the monks and priests embrace its dual nature, adorning its brutish frame with intricate tattoos, trinkets, and jewelry.



Key facts

Name: Yeti
Taxonomy: Ape, bear
Region: Himalayas
Habitat: Mountains
Mythical abilities: Guardian of holy sites
Threat to humans: 3

Final image © Tom Babbey



FOREWORD BY J.A.W. COOPER

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